" ocean was one wound. The crow waded in " the blood of the ſlain. When we had num- " bered twenty years, we lifted our ſpears on " high, and every where ſpread our renown.

" Eight

Plenum prandium unico actu
Difficile erat unius facere mentionem
Oriente ſole
Spicula vidi pungere
Propulſerunt arcus ex ſe ferra.

8.

Altum mugierunt enſes
Antequam in Laneo campo
Eiſlinus rex cecidit
Proceſſimus auro ditati
Ad terram proſtratorum dimicandum
Gladius ſecuit Clypeorum
Picturas in galearum conventu
Cervicum muſtum ex vulneribus
Diffuſum per cerebrum fiſſum.

9.

Tenuimus Clypeos in ſanguine
Cum haſtam unximus
Ante Boring holmum
Telorum nubes diſrumpunt clypeum
Extruſit arcus ex ſe metallum
Volnir cecidit in conflictu
Non erat illo rex major
Cæſi diſperſi late per littora
Feræ amplectebantur eſcam.

10.

Pugna manifeſte creſcebat
Antequam Freyr rex caderet
In Flandrorum terra
Cæpit cæruleus ad incidendum
Sanguine illitus in auream
Loricam in pugna

" Eight barons we overcame in the eaſt, be-
" fore the port of Diminum; and plentifully
" we feaſted the eagle in that ſlaughter. The
" warm ſtream of wounds ran into the ocean.
" The

Durus armorum mucro olim
Virgo deploravit matutinam lanienam
Multa præda dabatur feris.

11.

Centies centenos vidi jacere
In navibus
Ubi Ænglanes vocatur
Navigavimus ad pugnam
Per ſex dies antequam exercitus caderet
Tranſegimus mucronum miſſam
In exortu ſolis
Coactus eſt pro noſtris gladiis
Valdiofur in bello occumbere.

12.

Ruit pluvia ſanguinis de gladiis
Præceps in Bardafyrde
Pallidum corpus pro accipitribus
Murmuravit arcus ubi mucro
Acriter mordebat Loricas
In conflictu
Odini Pileus Galea
Cucurrit arcus ad vulnus
Venenate acutus conſperſus ſudore ſanguineo.

13.

Tenuimus magica ſcuta
Alte in pugnæ ludo
Ante Hiadningum ſinum
Videre licuit tum viros
Qui gladiis lacerarunt Clypeos
In gladiatorio murmure
Galeæ attritæ virorum

Erat

" The army fell before us. When we ſteered our
" ſhips into the mouth of the Viſtula, we ſent the
" Helſingians to the Hall of Odin. Then did
" the

Erat ſicut ſplendidam virginem
In lecto juxta ſe collocare.

14.

Dura venit tempeſtas Clypeis
Cadaver cecidit in terram
In Nortumbria
Erat circa matutinum tempus
Hominibus neceſſum erat fugere
Ex prælio ubi acute
Caſſidis campos mordebant gladii
Erat hoc veluti Juvenem viduam
In primaria ſede oſculari.

15.

Herthioſe evaſit fortunatus
In Auſtralibus Orcadibus ipſe
Victoriæ in noſtris hominibus
Cogebatur in armorum nimbo
Rogvaldus occumbere
Iſte venit ſummus ſuper accipitres
Luctus in gladiorum ludo
Strenue jactabat concuſſor
Galeæ ſanguinis teli.

16.

Quilibet jacebat tranſverſim ſupra alium
Gaudebat pugna lætus
Accipiter ob gladiorum ludum
Non fecit aquilam aut aprum
Qui Irlandiam gubernavit
Conventus fiebat ferri & Clypei
Marſtanus rex jejunis

" the ſword bite. The waters were all one wound.
" The earth was dyed red with the warm ſtream.
" The ſword rung upon the coats of mail, and
" clove

Fiebat in vedræ ſinu,
Præda data corvis.

17.

Bellatorem multum vidi cadere
Mane ante machæram
Virum in mucronum diſſidio
Filio meo incidit mature
Gladius juxta cor
Egillus fecit Agnerum ſpoliatum
Impertertitum virum vita
Sonuit lancea prope Hamdi
Griſeam loricam ſplendebant vexilla.

18.

Verborum tenaces vidi diſſecare
Haut minutim pro lupis
Endili maris enſibus
Erat per Hebdomadæ ſpacium
Quaſi mulieres vinum apportarent
Rubefactæ erant naves
Valde in ſtrepitu armorum
Sciſſa erat lorica
In Scioldungorum prælio.

19.

Pulchricomum vidi crepuſculaſcere
Virginis amatorem circa matutinum
Et confabulationis amicum viduarum
Erat ſicut calidum balneum
Vinei vaſis nympha portaret
Nos in Ilæ freto
Antiquam Orn rex caderet

San-

" clove the bucklers in twain. None fled on
" that day, till among his ſhips Heraudus fell.
" Than him no braver baron cleaves the ſea with
" ſhips;

Sanguineum Clypeum vidi ruptum
Hoc invertit virorum vitam.

20.

Egimus gladiorum ad cædem
Ludum in Lindis inſula
Cum regibus tribus
Pauci potuerunt inde lætari
Cecidit multus in rictum ferarum
Accipiter dilaniavit carnem cum lupo
Ut ſatur inde diſcederet
Hybernorum ſanguis in oceanum
Copioſe decidit per mactationis tempus.

21.

Alte gladius mordebat Clypeos
Tunc cum aurei coloris
Haſta fricabat loricas
Videre licuit in Onlugs inſula
Per ſecula multum poſt
Ibi fuit ad gladiorum ludos
Reges proceſſerunt
Rubicundum erat circa inſulam
Ar volans Draco vulnerum.

22.

Quid eſt viro forti morte certius
Etſi ipſe in armorum nimbo
Adverſus collocatus ſit
Sæpe deplorat ætatem
Qui nunquam premitur
Malum ferunt timidum incitare
Aquilam ad gladiorum ludum

" ſhips; a chearful heart did he ever bring to " the combat. Then the hoſt threw away their " ſhields, when the uplifted ſpear flew at the " breaſts

Meticuloſus venit nuſpiam
Cordi ſuo uſui.

23.

Hoc numero æquum ut procedat
In contactu gladiorum
Juvenis unus contra alterum
Non retrocedat vir a viro.
Hoc fuit viri fortis nobilitas diu
Semper debet amoris amicus virginum
Audax eſſe in fremitu armorum.

24.

Hoc videtur mihi re vera
Quod fata ſequimur
Rarus tranſgreditur fata Parcarum
Non deſtinavi Ellæ
De vitæ exitu meæ
Cum ego ſanguinem ſemimortuus tegerem
Et naves in aquas protruſi
Paſſim impetravimus tum feris
Eſcam in Scotiæ ſinubus.

25.

Hoc ridere me facit ſemper
Quod Balderi patris ſcamna
Parata ſcio in aula
Bibemus cereviſiam brevi
Ex concavis crateribus craniorum
Non gemit vir fortis contra mortem
Magnifici in Odini domibus
Non venio deſperabundis
Verbis ad odini aulam.

26.

" breaſts of heroes. The ſword bit the Scarſian
" rocks; bloody was the ſhield in battle, until
" Rafno the king was ſlain. From the heads of
" warriors the warm ſweat ſtreamed down their
" armour. The crows around the Indirian iſlands
" had

26.

Hic vellent nunc omnes
Filii Aſlaugæ gladiis
Amarum bellum excitare
Si exacte ſcirent
Calamitates noſtras
Quem non pauci angues
Venenati me diſcerpunt
Matrem accepi meis
Filiis ita ut corda valeant.

27.

Valde inclinatur ad hæreditatem
Crudele ſtat nocumentum a vipera
Anguis inhabitat aulam cordis
Speramus alterius ad Othini
Virgam in Ellæ ſanguine
Filiis meis liveſcet
Sua ira rubeſcet
Non acres juvenes
Seſſionem tranquillam facient.

28.

Habeo quinquagies
Prælia ſub ſignis facta
Ex belli invitatione & ſemel
Minime putavi hominum
Quod me futurus eſſet
Juvenis didici mucronem rubefacere
Alius rex præſtantior
Nos Aſæ invitabunt
Non eſt lugenda mors.

Fert

" had an ample prey. It were difficult to ſingle " out one among ſo many deaths. At the riſing " of the ſun I beheld the ſpears piercing the bo- " dies of foes, and the bows throwing forth their " ſteel-pointed arrows. Loud roared the ſwords " in the plains of Lano.---The virgin long be- " wailed the ſlaughter of that morning."---In this ſtrain the poet continues to deſcribe ſeveral other military exploits. The images are not much varied; the noiſe of arms, the ſtreaming of blood, and the feaſting the birds of prey, often recurring. He mentions the death of two of his ſons in battle; and the lamentation he deſcribes as made for one of them is very ſingular. A Grecian or Roman poet would have introduced the virgins or nymphs of the wood, bewailing the untimely fall of a young hero. But, ſays our Gothic poet, " when " Rogvaldus was ſlain, for him mourned all the " hawks of heaven," as lamenting a benefactor who had ſo liberally ſupplied them with prey; " for " boldly," as he adds, " in the ſtrife of ſwords, " did the breaker of helmets throw the ſpear of " blood."

The poems conclude with ſentiments of the higheſt bravery and contempt of death. " What

29.

Fert animus finire
Invitant me Dyſæ
Quas ex Othini Aula
Othinus mihi miſit
Lætus cereviſiam cum Aſis
In ſumma ſede bibam
Vitæ elapſæ ſunt horæ
Ridens moriar,

" is

" is more certain to the brave man than death,
" though amidſt the ſtorm of ſwords, he ſtand al-
" ways ready to oppoſe it? He only regrets this
" life who hath never known diſtreſs. The timo-
" rous man allures the devouring eagle to the
" field of battle. The coward, wherever he
" comes, is uſeleſs to himſelf. This I eſteem
" honourable, that the youth ſhould advance to
" the combat fairly matched one againſt another;
" nor man retreat from man. Long was this the
" warrior's higheſt glory. He who aſpires to the
" love of virgins, ought always to be foremoſt in
" the roar of arms. It appears to me of truth,
" that we are led by the Fates. Seldom can any
" overcome the appointment of deſtiny. Little
" did I foreſee that Ella * was to have my life in
" his hands, in that day when fainting I conceal-
" ed my blood, and puſhed forth my ſhips into
" the waves; after we had ſpread a repaſt for the
" beaſts of prey throughout the Scottiſh bays. But
" this makes me always rejoice that in the halls of
" our father Balder [or Odin] I know there are
" ſeats prepared, where, in a ſhort time, we ſhall
" be drinking ale out of the hollow ſkulls of our
" enemies. In the houſe of the mighty Odin,
" no brave man laments death. I come not with
" the voice of deſpair to Odin's hall. How eager-
" ly would all the ſons of Aſlauga now ruſh to
" war, did they know the diſtreſs of their father,
" whom a multitude of venomous ſerpents tear!

* This was the name of his enemy who had condemned him to death.

"I have given to my children a mother who hath "filled their hearts with valour. I am faſt ap- "proaching to my end. A cruel death awaits me "from the viper's bite. A ſnake dwells in the "midſt of my heart. I hope that the ſword of "ſome of my ſons ſhall yet be ſtained with the "blood of Ella. The valiant youths will wax red "with anger, and will not ſit in peace. Fifty and "one times have I reared the ſtandard in battle. "In my youth I learned to dye the ſword in blood: "my hope was then, that no king among men "would be more renowned than me. The god- "deſſes of death will now ſoon call me; I muſt not "mourn my death. Now I end my ſong. The "goddeſſes invite me away; they whom Odin has "ſent to me from his hall. I will ſit upon a lofty "ſeat, and drink ale joyfully with the goddeſſes of "death. The hours of my life are run out. I "will ſmile when I die."

This is ſuch poetry as we might expect from a barbarous nation. It breathes a moſt ferocious ſpirit. It is wild, harſh and irregular; but at the ſame time animated and ſtrong; the ſtyle, in the original, full of inverſions, and, as we learn from ſome of Olaus's notes, highly metaphorical and figured.

But when we open the works of Oſſian, a very different ſcene preſents itſelf. There we find the fire and the enthuſiaſm of the moſt early times, combined with an amazing degree of regularity and art. We find tenderneſs, and even delicacy of ſentiment, greatly predominant over fierceneſs and barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the

ſofteſt

ſofteſt feelings, and at the ſame time elevated with the higheſt ideas of magnanimity, generoſity, and true heroiſm. When we turn from the poetry of Lodbrog to that of Oſſian, it is like paſſing from a ſavage deſart, into a fertile and cultivated country. How is this to be accounted for? Or by what means to be reconciled with the remote antiquity attributed to theſe poems? This is a curious point; and requires to be illuſtrated.

That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original, is paſt all doubt. Their conformity with the Celtic nations in language, manners and religion, proves it to a full demonſtration. The Celtæ, a great and mighty people, altogether diſtinct from the Goths and Teutones, once extended their dominion over all the weſt of Europe; but ſeem to have had their moſt full and compleat eſtabliſhment in Gaul. Wherever the Celtæ or Gauls are mentioned by ancient writers, we ſeldom fail to hear of their Druids and their Bards; the inſtitution of which two orders, was the capital diſtinction of their manners and policy. The Druids were their philoſophers and prieſts; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions: And both theſe orders of men, ſeem to have ſubſiſted among them, as chief members of the ſtate, from time immemorial*. We muſt not therefore imagine

* Τρία φῦλα τῶν τιμωμενών διαφερόντως ἐςί. Βαρδοι τε καὶ ὐατεις, ϗ Δρῦιδαι. Βαρδοι μεν ὑμνηταὶ ϗ ποιηταὶ. Strabo. lib. 4.

Ε'ισι παρ' ἄυτοῖς καὶ ποιηταὶ μελων, ὅς βαρδυς ὀνομαζυσιν. ὅτοι δε μετ' ὀργάνων, ταῖς λυραις ὁμοιών, ὅς μεν ὑμνῦσι, ὅς δε βλασφημυσι. Diodor. Sicul. l. 5.

Τα

gine the Celtæ to have been altogether a groſs and rude nation. They poſſeſſed from very remote ages a formed ſyſtem of diſcipline and manners, which appears to have had a deep and laſting influence. Ammianus Marcellinus gives them this expreſs teſtimony, that there flouriſhed among them the ſtudy of the moſt laudable arts; introduced by the Bards, whoſe office it was to ſing in heroic verſe, the gallant actions of illuſtrious men; and by the Druids, who lived together in colleges or ſocieties, after the Pythagorean manner, and philoſophizing upon the higheſt ſubjects, aſſerted the immortality of the human ſoul *. Though Julius Cæſar in his account of Gaul, does not expreſly mention the Bards, yet it is plain that under the title of Druids, he comprehends that whole college or order; of which the Bards, who, it is probable, were the diſciples of the Druids, undoubtedly made a part. It deſerves remark, that according

Τα δε ἀκροσματα αὐτῶν εισιν οἱ καλουμενοι βαρδοι. ποιηται δ' ουτοι τυγχανουσι μετ' ὠδης ἐπαινους λεγοντες. Poſidonius ap. Athenæum, l. 6.

* Per hæc loca (ſpeaking of Gaul) hominibus paulatim excultis, *viguere ſtudia laudabilium doctrinarum*; inchoata per Bardos & Euhages & Druidas. Et Bardi quidem fortia virorum illuſtrium facta heroicis compoſita verſibus cum dulcibus lyræ modulis cantitarunt. Euhages vero ſcrutantes ſeriem & ſublimia naturæ pandere conabantur. Inter hos, Druidæ ingeniis celſiores, ut auctoritas Pythagoræ decrevit, ſodalitiis adſtricti conſortiis, quæſtionibus altarum occultarumque rerum erecti ſunt, & deſpectantes humana pronuntiarunt animas immortales. Amm. Marcellinus, l. 15. cap. 9.

to

to his account, the Druidical inſtitution firſt took riſe in Britain, and paſſed from thence into Gaul; ſo that they who aſpired to be thorough maſters of that learning were wont to reſort to Britain. He adds too, that ſuch as were to be initiated among the Druids, were obliged to commit to their memory a great number of verſes, inſomuch that ſome employed twenty years in this courſe of education; and that they did not think it lawful to record theſe poems in writing, but ſacredly handed them down by tradition from race to race*.

So ſtrong was the attachment of the Celtic nations to their poetry and their Bards, that amidſt all the changes of their governments and manners, even long after the order of the Druids was extinct, and the national religion altered, the Bards continued to flouriſh; not as a ſet of ſtrolling ſongſters, like the Greek Ἀοιδοι or Rhapſodiſts, in Homer's time, but as an order of men highly reſpected in the ſtate, and ſupported by a public eſtabliſhment. We find them according to the teſtimonies of Strabo and Diodorus, before the age of Auguſtus Cæſar; and we find them remaining under the ſame name, and exerciſing the ſame functions as of old, in Ireland, and in the north of Scotland, almoſt down to our own times. It is well known that in both theſe countries, every *Regulus* or chief had his own Bard, who was conſidered as an officer of rank in his court; and had lands aſſigned him, which deſcended to his family. Of the honour in which the Bards were held, many

* Vid. Cæſar de bello Gall. lib. 6.

inſtances

inſtances occur in Oſſian's poems. On all important occaſions, they were the ambaſſadors between contending chiefs; and their perſons were held ſacred. "Cairbar feared to ſtretch his ſword to "the bards, though his ſoul was dark.—Looſe "the bards, ſaid his brother Cathmor, they are "the ſons of other times. Their voice ſhall be "heard in other ages, when the kings of Temora "have failed *."

From all this, the Celtic tribes clearly appear to have been addicted in ſo high a degree to poetry, and to have made it ſo much their ſtudy from the earlieſt times, as may remove our wonder at meeting with a vein of higher poetical refinement among them, than was at firſt ſight to have been expected among nations, whom we are accuſtomed to call barbarous. Barbarity, I muſt obſerve, is a very equivocal term; it admits of many different forms and degrees; and though, in all of them, it exclude poliſhed manners, it is however, not inconſiſtent with generous ſentiments and tender affections †. What degrees of friendſhip, love and

* Vol. i. p. 263.

† Surely among the wild Laplanders, if any where, barbarity is in its moſt perfect ſtate. Yet their love ſongs which Scheffer has given us in his Lapponia, are a proof that natural tenderneſs of ſentiment may be found in a country, into which the leaſt glimmering of ſcience has never penetrated. To moſt Engliſh readers theſe ſongs are well known by the elegant tranſlations of them in the Spectator, N°. 366 and 406. I ſhall ſubjoin Scheffer's Latin

and heroiſm, may poſſibly be found to prevail in a rude ſtate of ſociety, no one can ſay. Aſtoniſhing inſtances of them we know, from hiſtory, have ſometimes appeared: and a few characters diſtinguiſhed by thoſe high qualities, might lay a foundation for a ſet of manners being introduced into the ſongs of the Bards, more refined, it is probable, and exalted, according to the uſual poetical licence, than the real manners of the country. In particular, with reſpect to heroiſm; the great employment of the Celtic bards, was to delineate the characters, and ſing the praiſes of heroes. So Lucan:

Latin verſion of one of them, which has the appearance of being ſtrictly literal.

Sol, clariſſimum emitte lumen in paludem Orra. Si eniſus in ſumma picearum cacumina ſcirem me viſurum Orra paludem, in ea eniterer, ut viderem inter quos amica, mea eſſet flores; omnes fuſcinderem frutices ibi enatos, omnes ramos præſecarem, hos virentes ramos. Curſum nubium eſſem ſecutus, quæ iter ſuum iſtituunt verſus paludem Orra, ſi ad te volare poſſem alis, cornicum alis. Sed mihi deſunt alæ, alæ querquedulæ, pedeſque, anſerum pedes plantæve bonæ, quæ deferre me valeant ad te. Satis expectaſti diu; per tot dies, tot dies tuos optimos, oculis tuis jucundiſſimis, corde tuo amiciſſimo. Quod ſi longiſſime velles effugere, cito tamen te conſequerer. Quid firmius validiuſve eſſe poteſt quam contorti nervi, catenæve ferreæ, quæ duriſſime ligant? Sic amor contorquet caput noſtrum, mutat cogitationes & ſententias. Puerorum voluntas, voluntas venti; juvenum cogitationes, longæ cogitationes. Quos ſi audirem omnes, a via, a via juſta declinarem. Unum eſt conſilium quod capiam; ita ſcio viam rectiorem me reperturum. Schefferi Lapponia, Cap. 25.

Vos quoque qui fortes animos, belloque peremptos,
Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
Plurima ſecuri fudiſtis carmina Bardi.

Pharſ. l. 1.

Now when we conſider a college or order of men, who, cultivating poetry throughout a long ſeries of ages, had their imaginations continually employed on the ideas of heroiſm; who had all the poems and panegyricks, which were compoſed by their predeceſſors, handed down to them with care; who rivalled and endeavoured to outſtrip thoſe who had gone before them, each in the celebration of his particular hero; is it not natural to think, that at length the character of a hero would appear in their ſongs with the higheſt luſtre, and be adorned with qualities truly noble? Some of the qualities indeed which diſtinguiſh a Fingal, moderation, humanity, and clemency, would not probably be the firſt ideas of heroiſm occurring to a barbarous people: But no ſooner had ſuch ideas begun to dawn on the minds of poets, than as the human mind eaſily opens to the native repreſentations of human perfection, they would be ſeized and embraced; they would enter into their panegyricks; they would afford materials for ſucceeding bards to work upon, and improve; they would contribute not a little to exalt the public manners. For ſuch ſongs as theſe, familiar to the Celtic warriors from their childhood, and throughout their whole life, both in war and in peace, their principal entertainment, muſt have had a very conſiderable influence in propagating among them real

real manners nearly approaching to the poetical; and in forming even ſuch a hero as Fingal. Eſpecially when we conſider that among their limited objects of ambition, among the few advantages which in a ſavage ſtate, man could obtain over man, the chief was Fame, and that Immortality which they expected to receive from their virtues and exploits, in the ſongs of bards *.

Having made theſe remarks on the Celtic poetry and Bards in general, I ſhall next conſider the particular advantages which Oſſian poſſeſſed. He appears clearly to have lived in a period which enjoyed all the benefit I juſt now mentioned of traditionary poetry. The exploits of Trathal, Trenmor, and the other anceſtors of Fingal, are ſpoken of as familiarly known. Ancient bards are frequently alluded to. In one remarkable paſſage, Oſſian deſcribes himſelf as living in a ſort of claſſical age, enlightened by the memorials of former times, which were conveyed in the ſongs of bards; and points at a period of darkneſs and ignorance which lay beyond the reach of tradition. "His "words," ſays he, "came only by halves to our "ears; they were dark as the tales of other times, "before the light of the ſong aroſe †." Oſſian, himſelf, appears to have been endowed by nature

* When Edward I. conquered Wales, he put to death all the Welch bards. This cruel policy plainly ſhews, how great an influence he imagined the ſongs of theſe bards to have over the minds of the people; and of what nature he judged that influence to be. The Welch bards were of the ſame Celtic race with the Scottiſh and Iriſh.

† Vol. i. p. 144.

with an exquiſite ſenſibility of heart; prone to that tender melancholy which is ſo often an attendant on great genius; and ſuſceptible equally of ſtrong and of ſoft emotions. He was not only a profeſſed bard, educated with care, as we may eaſily believe, to all the poetical art then known, and connected, as he ſhews us himſelf, in intimate friendſhip with the other contemporary bards, but a warrior alſo; and the ſon of the moſt renowned hero and prince of his age. This formed a conjunction of circumſtances, uncommonly favourable towards exalting the imagination of a poet. He relates expeditions in which he had been engaged; he ſings of battles in which he had fought and overcome; he had beheld the moſt illuſtrious ſcenes which that age could exhibit, both of heroiſm in war, and magnificence in peace. For however rude the magnificence of thoſe times may ſeem to us, we muſt remember that all ideas of magnificence are comparative; and that the age of Fingal was an æra of diſtinguiſhed ſplendor in that part of the world. Fingal reigned over a conſiderable territory; he was enriched with the ſpoils of the Roman province; he was ennobled by his victories and great actions; and was in all reſpects a perſonage of much higher dignity than any of the chieftains, or heads of Clans, who lived in the ſame country, after a more extenſive monarchy was eſtabliſhed.

The manners of Oſſian's age, ſo far as we can gather them from his writings, were abundantly favourable to a poetical genius. The two diſpiriting vices, to which Longinus imputes the decline

decline of poetry, covetouſneſs and effeminacy, were as yet unknown. The cares of men were few. They lived a roving indolent life; hunting and war their principal employments; and their chief amuſements, the muſick of bards and "the "feaſt of ſhells." The great object purſued by heroic ſpirits was "to receive their fame," that is, to become worthy of being celebrated in the ſongs of bards; and "to have their name on "the four gray ſtones." To die, unlamented by a bard, was deemed ſo great a misfortune, as even to diſturb their ghoſts in another ſtate. "They "wander in thick miſts beſide the reedy lake; but "never ſhall they riſe, without the ſong, to "the dwelling of winds." After death, they expected to follow employments of the ſame nature with thoſe which had amuſed them on earth; to fly with their friends on clouds, to purſue airy deer, and to liſten to their praiſe in the mouths of bards. In ſuch times as theſe, in a country where poetry had been ſo long cultivated, and ſo highly honoured, is it any wonder that among the race and ſucceſſion of bards, one Homer ſhould ariſe; a man who, endowed with a natural happy genius, favoured by peculiar advantages of birth and condition, and meeting in the courſe of his life, with a variety of incidents proper to fire his imagination, and to touch his heart, ſhould attain a degree of eminence in poetry, worthy to draw the admiration of more refined ages?

The compoſitions of Oſſian are ſo ſtrongly marked with characters of antiquity, that although there

were no external proof to ſupport that antiquity, hardly any reader of judgment and taſte, could heſitate in referring them to a very remote æra. There are four great ſtages through which men ſucceſſively paſs in the progreſs of ſociety. The firſt and earlieſt is the life of hunters; paſturage ſucceeds to this, as the ideas of property begin to take root; next agriculture; and laſtly, commerce. Throughout Oſſian's poems, we plainly find ourſelves in the firſt of theſe periods of ſociety; during which, hunting was the chief employment of men, and the principal method of their procuring ſubſiſtence. Paſturage was not indeed wholly unknown; for we hear of dividing the herd in the caſe of a divorce*; but the alluſions to herds and to cattle are not many; and of agriculture, we find no traces. No cities appear to have been built in the territories of Fingal. No arts are mentioned except that of navigation and of working in iron †. Every thing preſents to

* Vol. i. p. 44.

† Their ſkill in navigation need not at all ſurprize us. Living in the weſtern iſlands, along the coaſt, or in a country which is every where interſected with arms of the ſea, one of the firſt objects of their attention, from the earlieſt time, muſt have been how to traverſe the waters. Hence that knowledge of the ſtars, ſo neceſſary for guiding them by night, of which we find ſeveral traces in Oſſian's works; particularly in the beautiful deſcription of Cathmor's ſhield, in the 7th book of Temora. Among all the northern maritime nations, navigation was very early ſtudied. Piratical incurſions were the chief means they

to us the moſt ſimple and unimproved manners. At their feaſts, the heroes prepared their own repaſt; they ſat round the light of the burning oak; the wind lifted their locks, and whiſtled through their open halls. Whatever was beyond the neceſſaries of life, was known to them only as the ſpoil of the Roman province; "the gold of the "ſtranger; the lights of the ſtranger; the ſteeds "of the ſtranger, the children of the rein."

This repreſentation of Oſſian's times, muſt ſtrike us the more, as geniune and authentick, when it is compared with a poem of later date, which Mr. Macpherſon has preſerved in one of his notes. It is that wherein five bards are repreſented as paſſing the evening in the houſe of a chief, and each of them ſeparately giving his deſcription of the night*. The night ſcenery is beautiful; and the author has plainly imitated the ſtyle and manner of Oſſian: But he has allowed ſome images to appear which betray a later period of ſociety. For we

they employed for acquiring booty; and were among the firſt exploits which diſtinguiſhed them in the world. Even the ſavage Americans were at their firſt diſcovery found to poſſeſs the moſt ſurprizing ſkill and dexterity in navigating their immenſe lakes and rivers.

The deſcription of Cuchullin's chariot, in the 1ſt book of Fingal, has been objected to by ſome, as repreſenting greater magnificence than is conſiſtent with the ſuppoſed poverty of that age. But this chariot is plainly only a horſe-litter; and the gems mentioned in the deſcription, are no other than the ſhining ſtones or pebbles, known to be frequently found along the weſtern coaſt of Scotland.

* Vol. i. p. 350.

meet with windows clapping, the herds of goats and cows ſeeking ſhelter, the ſhepherd wandering, corn on the plain, and the wakeful hind rebuilding the ſhocks of corn which had been overturned by the tempeſt. Whereas in Oſſian's works, from beginning to end, all is conſiſtent; no modern alluſion drops from him; but every where, the ſame face of rude nature appears; a country wholly uncultivated, thinly inhabited, and recently peopled. The graſs of the rock, the flower of the heath, the thiſtle with its beard, are the chief ornaments of his landſcapes. "The deſart," ſays Fingal, "is enough to me, with all its woods "and deer *."

The circle of ideas and tranſactions, is no wider than ſuits ſuch an age: Nor any greater diverſity introduced into characters, than the events of that period would naturally diſplay. Valour and bodily ſtrength are the admired qualities. Contentions ariſe, as is uſual among ſavage nations, from the ſlighteſt cauſes. To be affronted at a tournament, or to be omitted in the invitation to a feaſt, kindles a war. Women are often carried away by force; and the whole tribe, as in the Homeric times, riſe to avenge the wrong. The heroes ſhow refinement of ſentiment indeed on ſeveral occaſions, but none of manners. They ſpeak of their paſt actions with freedom, boaſt of their exploits, and ſing their own praiſe. In their battles, it is evident that drums, trumpets, or bagpipes, were not known or uſed. They had no expedient

* Vol. i. p. 116.

for

for giving the military alarms but ſtriking a ſhield, or raiſing a loud cry: And hence the loud and terrible voice of Fingal is often mentioned, as a neceſſary qualification of a great general; like the βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Μενελαος of Homer. Of military diſcipline or ſkill, they appear to have been entirely deſtitute. Their armies ſeem not to have been numerous; their battles were diſorderly; and terminated, for the moſt part, by a perſonal combat, or wreſtling of the two chiefs; after which, "the bard ſung the ſong of peace, "and the battle ceaſed along the field*."

The manner of compoſition bears all the marks of the greateſt antiquity. No artful tranſitions; nor full and extended connection of parts; ſuch as we find among the poets of later times, when order and regularity of compoſition were more ſtudied and known; but a ſtyle always rapid and vehement; in narration conciſe even to abruptneſs, and leaving ſeveral circumſtances to be ſupplied by the reader's imagination. The language has all that figurative caſt, which, as I before ſhewed, partly a glowing and undiſciplined imagination, partly the ſterility of language and the want of proper terms, have always introduced into the early ſpeech of nations; and in ſeveral reſpects, it carries a remarkable reſemblance to the ſtyle of the Old Teſtament. It deſerves particular notice, as one of the moſt geniune and deciſive characters of antiquity, that very few general terms or abſtract ideas, are to be met with in the

* Vol. i. p. 197.

whole

whole collection of Oſſian's works. The ideas of men, at firſt, were all particular. They had not words to expreſs general conceptions. Theſe were the conſequence of more profound reflection and longer acquaintance with the arts of thought and of ſpeech. Oſſian, accordingly, almoſt never expreſſes himſelf in the abſtract. His ideas extended little farther than to the objects he ſaw around him. A public, a community, the univerſe, were conceptions beyond his ſphere. Even a mountain, a ſea, or a lake, which he has occaſion to mention, though only in a ſimile, are for the moſt part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the ſtorm of the ſea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego. A mode of expreſſion, which whilſt it is characteriſtical of ancient ages, is at the ſame time highly favourable to deſcriptive poetry. For the ſame reaſons, perſonification is a poetical figure not very common with Oſſian. Inanimate objects, ſuch as winds, trees, flowers, he ſometimes perſonifies with great beauty. But the perſonifications which are ſo familiar to later poets of Fame, Time, Terror, Virtue, and the reſt of that claſs, were unknown to our Celtic bard. Theſe were modes of conception too abſtract for his age.

All theſe are marks ſo undoubted, and ſome of them too, ſo nice and delicate, of the moſt early times, as put the high antiquity of theſe poems out of queſtion. Eſpecially when we conſider, that if there had been any impoſture in this caſe, it muſt have been contrived and executed in the Highlands

Highlands of Scotland, two or three centuries ago; as up to this period, both by manuſcripts, and by the teſtimony of a multitude of living witneſſes, concerning the uncontrovertible tradition of theſe poems, they can clearly be traced. Now this is a period when that country enjoyed no advantages for a compoſition of this kind, which it may not be ſuppoſed to have enjoyed in as great, if not in a greater degree, a thouſand years before. To ſuppoſe that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been in a ſtate of groſs ignorance and barbarity, there ſhould have ariſen in that country a poet, of ſuch exquiſite genius, and of ſuch deep knowledge of mankind, and of hiſtory, as to diveſt himſelf of the ideas and manners of his own age, and to give us a juſt and natural picture of a ſtate of ſociety ancienter by a thouſand years; one who could ſupport this counterfeited antiquity through ſuch a large collection of poems, without the leaſt inconſiſtency; and who poſſeſſed of all this genius and art, had at the ſame time the ſelf-denial of concealing himſelf, and of aſcribing his own works to an antiquated bard, without the impoſture being detected; is a ſuppoſition that tranſcends all bounds of credibility.

There are, beſides, two other circumſtances to be attended to, ſtill of greater weight, if poſſible, againſt this hypotheſis. One is the total abſence of religious ideas from this work; for which the tranſlator has, in his preface, given a very probable account, on the footing of its being the work of Oſſian. The druidical ſuperſtition was, in the days

days of Oſſian, on the point of its final extinction; and for particular reaſons, odious to the family of Fingal; whilſt the Chriſtian faith was not yet eſtabliſhed. But had it been the work of one, to whom the ideas of chriſtianity were familiar from his infancy; and who had ſuperadded to them alſo the bigotted ſuperſtition of a dark age and country; it is impoſſible but in ſome paſſage or other, the traces of them would have appeared. The other circumſtance is, the entire ſilence which reigns with reſpect to all the great clans or families, which are now eſtabliſhed in the Highlands. The origin of theſe ſeveral clans is known to be very ancient: And it is as well known, that there is no paſſion by which a native Highlander is more diſtinguiſhed, than by attachment to his clan, and jealouſy for its honour. That a Highland bard, in forging a work relating to the antiquities of his country, ſhould have inſerted no circumſtance which pointed out the riſe of his own clan, which aſcertained its antiquity, or increaſed its glory, is of all ſuppoſitions that can be formed, the moſt improbable; and the ſilence on this head, amounts to a demonſtration that the author lived before any of the preſent great clans were formed or known.

Aſſuming it then, as we well may, for certain, that the poems now under conſideration, are genuine venerable monuments of very remote antiquity; I proceed to make ſome remarks upon their general ſpirit and ſtrain. The two great characteriſtics of Oſſian's poetry are, tenderneſs and ſublimity. It breathes nothing of the gay

and

and chearful kind; an air of ſolemnity and ſeriouſneſs is diffuſed over the whole. Oſſian is perhaps the only poet who never relaxes, or lets himſelf down into the light and amuſing ſtrain; which I readily admit to be no ſmall diſadvantage to him, with the bulk of readers. He moves perpetually in the high region of the grand and the pathetick. One key note is ſtruck at the beginning, and ſupported to the end; nor is any ornament introduced, but what is perfectly concordant with the general tone or melody. The events recorded, are all ſerious and grave; the ſcenery throughout, wild and romantic. The extended heath by the ſea ſhore; the mountain ſhaded with miſt; the torrent ruſhing through a ſolitary valley; the ſcattered oaks, and the tombs of warriors overgrown with moſs; all produce a ſolemn attention in the mind, and prepare it for great and extraordinary events. We find not in Oſſian, an imagination that ſports itſelf, and dreſſes out gay trifles to pleaſe the fancy. His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deſerves to be ſtiled, *The Poetry of the Heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble ſentiments, and with ſublime and tender paſſions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy; a heart that is full, and pours itſelf forth. Oſſian did not write, like modern poets, to pleaſe readers and critics. He ſung from the love of poetry and ſong. His delight was to think of the heroes among whom he had flouriſhed; to recall the affecting incidents of his life; to dwell upon his paſt wars and loves and friendſhips; till, as he expreſſes it himſelf,

" there

" there comes a voice to Oſſian and awakes his " ſoul. It is the voice of years that are gone; " they roll before me with all their deeds;" and under this true poetic inſpiration, giving vent to his genius, no wonder we ſhould ſo often hear, and acknowledge in his ſtrains, the powerful and ever-pleaſing voice of nature.

——Arte, natura potentior omni.—
Eſt Deus in nobis, agitante caleſcimus illo.

It is neceſſary here to obſerve, that the beauties of Oſſian's writings cannot be felt by thoſe who have given them only a ſingle or a haſty peruſal. His manner is ſo different from that of the poets, to whom we are moſt accuſtomed; his ſtyle is ſo conciſe, and ſo much crowded with imagery; the mind is kept at ſuch a ſtretch in accompanying the author; that an ordinary reader is at firſt apt to be dazzled and fatigued, rather than pleaſed. His poems require to be taken up at intervals, and to be frequently reviewed; and then it is impoſſible but his beauties muſt open to every reader who is capable of ſenſibility. Thoſe who have the higheſt degree of it, will reliſh them the moſt.

As Homer is of all the great poets, the one whoſe manner, and whoſe times come the neareſt to Oſſian's, we are naturally led to run a parallel in ſome inſtances, between the Greek and the Celtic bard. For though Homer lived more than a thouſand years before Oſſian, it is not from the age of the world, but from the ſtate of ſociety, that we are to judge of reſembling times. The Greek has, in ſeveral points, a manifeſt ſuperiority. He

introduces a greater variety of incidents; he poſſeſſes a larger compaſs of ideas; has more diverſity in his characters; and a much deeper knowledge of human nature. It was not to be expected, that in any of theſe particulars, Oſſian could equal Homer. For Homer lived in a country where ſociety was much farther advanced; he had beheld many more objects; cities built and flouriſhing; laws inſtituted; order, diſcipline, and arts begun. His field of obſervation was much larger and more ſplendid; his knowledge, of courſe, more extenſive; his mind alſo, it ſhall be granted, more penetrating. But if Oſſian's ideas and objects be leſs diverſified than thoſe of Homer, they are all, however, of the kind fitteſt for poetry: The bravery and generoſity of heroes, the tenderneſs of lovers, the attachments of friends, parents, and children. In a rude age and country, though the events that happen be few, the undiſſipated mind broods over them more; they ſtrike the imagination, and fire the paſſions in a higher degree; and of conſequence become happier materials to a poetical genius, than the ſame events when ſcattered through the wide circle of more varied action, and cultivated life.

Homer is a more chearful and ſprightly poet than Oſſian. You diſcern in him all the Greek vivacity; whereas Oſſian uniformly maintains the gravity and ſolemnity of a Celtic hero. This too is in a great meaſure to be accounted for from the different ſituations in which they lived, partly perſonal, and partly national. Oſſian had ſurvived all his friends, and was diſpoſed to melancholy by the incidents

incidents of his life. But beſides this, chearfulneſs is one of the many bleſſings which we owe to formed ſociety. The ſolitary wild ſtate is always a ſerious one. Bating the ſudden and violent burſts of mirth, which ſometimes break forth at their dances and feaſts; the ſavage American tribes have been noted by all travellers for their gravity and taciturnity. Somewhat of this taciturnity may be alſo remarked in Oſſian. On all occaſions he is frugal of his words; and never gives you more of an image or a deſcription, than is juſt ſufficient to place it before you in one clear point of view. It is a blaze of lightning, which flaſhes and vaniſhes. Homer is more extended in his deſcriptions; and fills them up with a greater variety of circumſtances. Both the poets are dramatick; that is, they introduce their perſonages frequently ſpeaking before us. But Oſſian is conciſe and rapid in his ſpeeches, as he is in every other thing. Homer, with the Greek vivacity, had alſo ſome portion of the Greek loquacity. His ſpeeches indeed are highly characteriſtical; and to them we are much indebted for that admirable diſplay he has given of human nature. Yet if he be tedious any where, it is in theſe; ſome of them trifling; and ſome of them plainly unſeaſonable. Both poets are eminently ſublime; but a difference may be remarked in the ſpecies of their ſublimity. Homer's ſublimity is accompained with more impetuoſity and fire; Oſſian's with more of a ſolemn and awful grandeur. Homer hurries you along; Oſſian elevates, and fixes you in aſtoniſhment. Homer is

moſt

moſt ſublime in actions and battles; Oſſian, in deſcription and ſentiment. In the pathetick, Homer, when he chuſes to exert it, has great power; but Oſſian exerts that power much oftener, and has the character of tenderneſs far more deeply imprinted on his works. No poet knew better how to ſeize and melt the heart. With regard to dignity of ſentiment, the pre-eminence muſt clearly be given to Oſſian. This is indeed a ſurpriſing circumſtance, that in point of humanity, magnanimity, virtuous feelings of every kind, our rude Celtic bard ſhould be diſtinguiſhed to ſuch a degree, that not only the heroes of Homer, but even thoſe of the polite and refined Virgil, are left far behind by thoſe of Oſſian.

After theſe general obſervations on the genius and ſpirit of our author, I now proceed to a nearer view, and more accurate examination of his works: and as Fingal is the firſt great poem in this collection, it is proper to begin with it. To refuſe the title of an epic poem to Fingal, becauſe it is not in every little particular, exactly conformable to the practice of Homer and Virgil, were the mere ſqueamiſhneſs and pedantry of criticiſm. Examined even according to Ariſtotle's rules, it will be found to have all the eſſential requiſites of a true and regular epic; and to have ſeveral of them in ſo high a degree, as at firſt view to raiſe our aſtoniſhment on finding Oſſian's compoſition ſo agreeable to rules of which he was entirely ignorant. But our aſtoniſhment will ceaſe, when we conſider from what ſource Ariſtotle drew thoſe

rules. Homer knew no more of the laws of criticiſm than Oſſian. But guided by nature, he compoſed in verſe a regular ſtory, founded on heroic actions, which all poſterity admired. Ariſtotle, with great ſagacity and penetration, traced the cauſes of this general admiration. He obſerved what it was in Homer's compoſition, and in the conduct of his ſtory, which gave it ſuch power to pleaſe; from this obſervation he deduced the rules which poets ought to follow, who would write and pleaſe like Homer; and to a compoſition formed according to ſuch rules, he gave the name of an epic poem. Hence his whole ſyſtem aroſe. Ariſtotle ſtudied nature in Homer. Homer and Oſſian both wrote from nature. No wonder that among all the three, there ſhould be ſuch agreement and conformity.

The fundamental rules delivered by Ariſtotle concerning an epic poem, are theſe: That the action which is the ground work of the poem, ſhould be one, compleat, and great; that it ſhould be feigned, not merely hiſtorical; that it ſhould be enlivened with characters and manners; and heightened by the marvellous.

But before entering on any of theſe, it may perhaps be aſked, what is the moral of Fingal? For, according to M. Boſſu, an epic poem is no other than an allegory contrived to illuſtrate ſome moral truth. The poet, ſays this critic, muſt begin with fixing on ſome maxim, or inſtruction, which he intends to inculcate on mankind. He next forms a fable, like one of Æſop's, wholly with a view

a view to the moral; and having thus ſettled and arranged his plan, he then looks into traditionary hiſtory for names and incidents, to give his fable ſome air of probability. Never did a more frigid, pedantic notion, enter into the mind of a critic. We may ſafely pronounce, that he who ſhould compoſe an epic poem after this manner, who ſhould firſt lay down a moral and contrive a plan, before he had thought of his perſonages and actors, might deliver indeed very ſound inſtruction, but would find few readers. There cannot be the leaſt doubt that the firſt object which ſtrikes an epic poet, which fires his genius, and gives him any idea of his work, is the action or ſubject he is to celebrate. Hardly is there any tale, any ſubject a poet can chuſe for ſuch a work, but will afford ſome general moral inſtruction. An epic poem is by its nature one of the moſt moral of all poetical compoſitions: But its moral tendency is by no means to be limited to ſome common-place maxim, which may be gathered from the ſtory. It ariſes from the admiration of heroic actions, which ſuch a compoſition is peculiarly calculated to produce; from the virtuous emotions which the characters and incidents raiſe, whilſt we read it; from the happy impreſſion which all the parts ſeparately, as well as the whole taken together, leave upon the mind. However, if a general moral be ſtill inſiſted on, Fingal obviouſly furniſhes one, not inferior to that of any other Poet, viz. That Wiſdom and Bravery always triumph over brutal force; or another nobler ſtill; That the moſt compleat victory

over an enemy is obtained by that moderation and generoſity which convert him into a friend.

The unity of the Epic action, which, of all Ariſtotle's rules, is the chief and moſt material, is ſo ſtrictly preſerved in Fingal, that it muſt be perceived by every reader. It is a more compleat unity than what ariſes from relating the actions of one man, which the Greek critic juſtly cenſures as imperfect; it is the unity of one enterpriſe, the deliverance of Ireland from the invaſion of Swaran: An enterpriſe, which has ſurely the full Heroic dignity. All the incidents recorded bear a conſtant reference to one end; no double plot is carried on; but the parts unite into a regular whole: And as the action is one and great, ſo it is an entire or compleat action. For we find, as the Critic farther requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; a Nodus, or intrigue in the Poem; Difficulties occuring through Cuchullin's raſhneſs and bad ſucceſs; thoſe difficulties gradually ſurmounted; and at laſt the work conducted to that happy concluſion which is held eſſential to Epic Poetry. Unity is indeed obſerved with greater exactneſs in Fingal, than in almoſt any other Epic compoſition. For not only is unity of ſubject maintained, but that of time and place alſo. The Autumn is clearly pointed out as the ſeaſon of the action; and from beginning to end the ſcene is never ſhifted from the heath of Lena, along the ſea-ſhore. The duration of the action in Fingal, is much ſhorter than in the Iliad or Æneid. But ſure, there may be ſhorter as well as longer Heroic Poems; and if the

the authority of Ariſtotle be alſo required for this, he ſays expreſly that the Epic compoſition is indefinite as to the time of its duration. Accordingly the Action of the Iliad laſts only forty-ſeven days, whilſt that of the Æneid is continued for more than a year.

Throughout the whole of Fingal, there reigns that grandeur of ſentiment, ſtyle and imagery, which ought ever to diſtinguiſh this high ſpecies of poetry. The ſtory is conducted with no ſmall art. The Poet goes not back to a tedious recital of the beginning of the war with Swaran; but haſtening to the main action, he falls in exactly, by a moſt happy coincidence of thought, with the rule of Horace.

Semper ad eventum feſtinat, & in medias res,
Non ſecus ac notas, auditorem rapit——
Nec gemino bellum Trojanum orditur ab ovo.
De Arte Poet.

He invokes no muſe, for he acknowledged none; but his occaſional addreſſes to Malvina, have a finer effect than the invocation of any muſe. He ſets out with no formal propoſition of his ſubject; but the ſubject naturally and eaſily unfolds itſelf; the poem opening in an animated manner, with the ſituation of Cuchullin, and the arrival of a ſcout who informs him of Swaran's landing. Mention is preſently made of Fingal, and of the expected aſſiſtance from the ſhips of the lonely iſle, in order to give further light to the ſubject. For the poet often ſhows his addreſs in gradually preparing us for the events he is to introduce; and

in particular the preparation for the appearance of Fingal, the previous expectations that are raiſed, and the extreme magnificence fully anſwering theſe expectations, with which the hero is at length preſented to us, are all worked up with ſuch ſkillful conduct as would do honour to any poet of the moſt refined times. Homer's art in magnifying the character of Achilles has been univerſally admired. Oſſian certainly ſhows no leſs art in aggrandizing Fingal. Nothing could be more happily imagined for this purpoſe than the whole management of the laſt battle, wherein Gaul the ſon of Morni, had beſought Fingal to retire, and to leave to him and his other chiefs the honour of the day. The generoſity of the King in agreeing to this propoſal; the majeſty with which he retreats to the hill, from whence he was to behold the engagement, attended by his Bards, and waving the lightning of his ſword; his perceiving the chiefs overpowered by numbers, but from unwillingneſs to deprive them of the glory of victory by coming in perſon to their aſſiſtance, firſt ſending Ullin, the Bard, to animate their courage; and at laſt, when the danger becomes more preſſing, his riſing in his might, and interpoſing, like a divinity, to decide the doubtful fate of the day; are all circumſtances contrived with ſo much art as plainly diſcover the Celtic Bards to have been not unpractiſed in Heroic poetry.

The ſtory which is the foundation of the Iliad is in itſelf as ſimple as that of Fingal. A quarrel ariſes between Achilles and Agamemnon concerning a female ſlave; on which, Achilles, apprehend-

ing himſelf to be injured, withdraws his aſſiſtance from the reſt of the Greeks. The Greeks fall into great diſtreſs, and beſeech him to be reconciled to them. He refuſes to fight for them in perſon, but ſends his friend Patroclus; and upon his being ſlain, goes forth to revenge his death, and kills Hector. The ſubject of Fingal is this: Swaran comes to invade Ireland: Cuchullin, the guardian of the young King, had applied for aſſiſtance to Fingal, who reigned in the oppoſite coaſt of Scotland. But before Fingal's arrival, he is hurried by raſh counſel to encounter Swaran. He is defeated; he retreats; and deſponds. Fingal arrives in this conjuncture. The battle is for ſome time dubious; but in the end he conquers Swaran; and the remembrance of Swaran's being the brother of Agandecca, who had once ſaved his life, makes him diſmiſs him honourably. Homer it is true has filled up his ſtory with a much greater variety of particulars than Oſſian; and in this has ſhown a compaſs of invention ſuperior to that of the other poet. But it muſt not be forgotten, that though Homer be more circumſtantial, his incidents however are leſs diverſified in kind than thoſe of Oſſian. War and bloodſhed reign throughout the Iliad; and notwithſtanding all the fertility of Homer's invention, there is ſo much uniformity in his ſubjects, that there are few readers, who before the cloſe, are not tired of perpetual fighting. Whereas in Oſſian, the mind is relieved by a more agreeable diverſity. There is a finer mixture of war and heroiſm, with love and friendſhip, of

martial, with tender ſcenes, than is to be met with, perhaps, in any other poet. The Epiſodes too, have great propriety; as natural, and proper to that age and country: conſiſting of the ſongs of Bards, which are known to have been the great entertainment of the Celtic heroes in war, as well as in peace. Theſe ſongs are not introduced at random; if you except the Epiſode of Duchommar and Morna, in the firſt book, which though beautiful, is more unartful, than any of the reſt; they have always ſome particular relation to the actor who is intereſted, or to the events which are going on; and, whilſt they vary the ſcene, they preſerve a ſufficient connection with the main ſubject, by the fitneſs and propriety of their introduction.

As Fingal's love to Agandecca, influences ſome circumſtances of the Poem, particularly the honourable diſmiſſion of Swaran at the end; it was neceſſary that we ſhould be let into this part of the hero's ſtory. But as it lay without the compaſs of the preſent action, it could be regularly introduced no where, except in an Epiſode. Accordingly the poet, with as much propriety, as if Ariſtotle himſelf had directed the plan, has contrived an Epiſode for this purpoſe in the ſong of Carril, at the beginning of the third book.

The concluſion of the poem is ſtrictly according to rule; and is every way noble and pleaſing. The reconciliation of the contending heroes, the conſolation of Cuchullin, and the general felicity that crowns the action, ſooth the mind in a very agreeable manner, and form that paſſage from agitation

agitation and trouble, to perfect quiet and repoſe, which critics require as the proper termination of the Epic work. "Thus they paſſed the night in "ſong, and brought back the morning with joy. "Fingal aroſe on the heath; and ſhook his "glittering ſpear in his hand. He moved firſt to-"wards the plains of Lena; and we followed like "a ridge of fire. Spread the ſail, ſaid the King of "Morven, and catch the winds that pour from "Lena.—We roſe on the wave with ſongs; and "ruſhed with joy through the foam of the ocean." —So much for the unity and general conduct of the Epic action in Fingal.

With regard to that property of the ſubject which Ariſtotle requires that it ſhould be feigned not hiſtorical, he muſt not be underſtood ſo ſtrictly, as if he meant to exclude all ſubjects which have any foundation in truth. For ſuch excluſion would both be unreaſonable in itſelf; and what is more, would be contrary to the practice of Homer, who is known to have founded his Iliad on hiſtorical facts concerning the war of Troy, which was famous throughout all Greece. Ariſtotle means no more than that it is the buſineſs of a poet not to be a mere annaliſt of Facts, but to embelliſh truth with beautiful, probable, and uſeful fictions; to copy nature, as he himſelf explains it, like painters, who preſerve a likeneſs, but exhibit their objects more grand and beautiful than they are in reality. That Oſſian has followed this courſe, and building upon true hiſtory, has ſufficiently adorned it with poetical fiction for aggrandizing his characters

ters and facts, will not, I believe, be queſtioned by moſt readers. At the ſame time, the foundation which thoſe facts and characters had in truth, and the ſhare which the poet himſelf had in the tranſactions which he records, muſt be conſidered as no ſmall advantage to his work. For truth makes an impreſſion on the mind far beyond any fiction; and no man, let his imagination be ever ſo ſtrong, relates any events ſo feelingly as thoſe in which he has been intereſted; paints any ſcene ſo naturally as one which he has ſeen; or draws any characters in ſuch ſtrong colours as thoſe which he has perſonally known. It is conſidered as an advantage of the Epic ſubject to be taken from a period ſo diſtant, as by being involved in the darkneſs of tradition, may give licence to fable. Though Oſſian's ſubject may at firſt view appear unfavourable in this reſpect, as being taken from his own times, yet when we reflect that he lived to an extreme old age; that he relates what had been tranſacted in another country, at the diſtance of many years, and after all that race of men who had been the actors were gone off the ſtage; we ſhall find the objection in a great meaſure obviated. In ſo rude an age, when no written records were known, when tradition was looſe, and accuracy of any kind little attended to, what was great and heroic in one generation, eaſily ripened into the marvellous in the next.

The natural repreſentation of human characters in an Epic Poem is highly eſſential to its merit: And in reſpect of this there can be no doubt of Homer's excelling all the heroic poets who have ever

ever wrote. But though Oſſian be much inferior to Homer in this article, he will be found to be equal at leaſt, if not ſuperior, to Virgil; and has indeed given all the diſplay of human nature which the ſimple occurrences of his times could be expected to furniſh. No dead uniformity of character prevails in Fingal; but on the contrary the principal characters are not only clearly diſtinguiſhed, but ſometimes artfully contraſted ſo as to illuſtrate each other. Oſſian's heroes are like Homer's, all brave; but their bravery, like thoſe of Homer's too, is of different kinds. For inſtance; the prudent, the ſedate, the modeſt and circumſpect Connal, is finely oppoſed to the preſumptuous, raſh, overbearing, but gallant and generous Calmar. Calmar hurries Cuchullin into action by his temerity; and when he ſees the bad effect of his counſels, he will not ſurvive the diſgrace. Connal, like another Ulyſſes, attends Cuchullin to his retreat, counſels, and comforts him under his misfortune. The fierce, the proud, and high ſpirited Swaran is admirably contraſted with the calm, the moderate, and generous Fingal. The character of Oſcar is a favourite one throughout the whole Poems. The amiable warmth of the young warrior; his eager impetuoſity in the day of action; his paſſion for fame; his ſubmiſſion to his father; his tenderneſs for Malvina; are the ſtrokes of a maſterly pencil; the ſtrokes are few; but it is the hand of nature, and attracts the heart. Oſſian's own character, the old man, the hero, and the bard, all in one, preſents to us through the whole work

work a moſt reſpectable and venerable figure, which we always contemplate with pleaſure. Cuchullin is a hero of the higheſt claſs; daring, magnanimous, and exquiſitely ſenſible to honour. We become attached to his intereſt, and are deeply touched with his diſtreſs; and after the admiration raiſed for him in the firſt part of the Poem, it is a ſtrong proof of Oſſian's maſterly genius that he durſt adventure to produce to us another hero, compared with whom, even the great Cuchullin, ſhould be only an inferior perſonage; and who ſhould riſe as far above him, as Cuchullin riſes above the reſt.

Here indeed, in the character and deſcription of Fingal, Oſſian triumphs almoſt unrivalled: For we may boldly defy all antiquity to ſhews us any hero equal to Fingal. Homer's Hector poſſeſſes ſeveral great and amiable qualities; but Hector is a ſecondary perſonage in the Iliad, not the hero of the work. We ſee him only occaſionally; we know much leſs of him than we do of Fingal; who not only in this Epic Poem, but in Temora, and throughout the reſt of Oſſian's works, is preſented in all that variety of lights, which give the full diſplay of a character. And though Hector faithfully diſcharges his duty to his country, his friends, and his family, he is tinctured, however, with a degree of the ſame ſavage ferocity, which prevails among all the Homeric heroes. For we find him inſulting over the fallen Patroclus, with the moſt cruel taunts, and telling him when he lies in the agony of death, that Achilles cannot help him now;

and

and that in a ſhort time his body, ſtripped naked, and deprived of funeral honours, ſhall be devoured by the Vulturs*. Whereas in the character of Fingal, concur almoſt all the qualities that can ennoble human nature; that can either make us admire the hero, or love the man. He is not only unconquerable in war, but he makes his people happy by his wiſdom in the days of peace †. He is truly the father of his people. He is known by the epithet of "Fingal of the mildeſt look;" and diſtinguiſhed on every occaſion, by humanity and generoſity. He is merciful to his foes ‡; full of affection to his children; full of concern about his friends; and never mentions Agandecca, his firſt love, without the utmoſt tenderneſs. He is the univerſal protector of the diſtreſſed; "None "ever went ſad from Fingal ‖."——"O Oſcar! "bend the ſtrong in arms; but ſpare the feeble "hand. Be thou a ſtream of many tides againſt "the foes of thy people; but like the gale that

* Iliad 16. 830, Il. 17. 127.

† Vol. i. p. 92.

‡ When he commands his ſons, after Swaran is taken priſoner, to "purſue the reſt of Lochlin, over the heath "of Lena; that no veſſel may hereafter bound on the "dark-rolling waves of Iniſtore;" he means not aſſuredly, as ſome have miſrepreſented him, to order a general ſlaughter of the foes, and to prevent their ſaving themſelves by flight; but, like a wiſe general, he commands his chiefs to render the victory compleat, by a total rout of the enemy; that they might adventure no more for the future, to fit out any fleet againſt him or his allies.

‖ Vol. i. p. 111.

"moves

" moves the graſs, to thoſe who aſk thine aid.
" So Trenmor lived; ſuch Trathal was; and
" ſuch has Fingal been. My arm was the ſupport
" of the injured; the weak reſted behind the light-
" ning of my ſteel *."—Theſe were the maxims of true heroiſm, to which he formed his grandſon. His fame is repreſented as every where ſpread; the greateſt heroes acknowledge his ſuperiority; his enemies tremble at his name; and the higheſt encomium that can be beſtowed on one whom the poet would moſt exalt, is to ſay, that his ſoul was like the ſoul of Fingal.

To do juſtice to the poet's merit, in ſupporting ſuch a character as this, I muſt obſerve, what is not commonly attended to, that there is no part of poetical execution more difficult, than to draw a perfect character in ſuch a manner, as to render it diſtinct and affecting to the mind. Some ſtrokes of human imperfection and frailty, are what uſually give us the moſt clear view, and the moſt ſenſible impreſſion of a character; becauſe they preſent to us a man, ſuch as we have ſeen; they recall known features of human nature. When poets attempt to go beyond this range, and deſcribe a faultleſs hero, they, for the moſt part, ſet before us, a ſort of vague undiſtinguiſhable character, ſuch as the imagination cannot lay hold of, or realize to itſelf, as the object of affection. We know how much Virgil has failed in this particular. His perfect hero, Æneas, is an unanimated, inſipid perſonage, whom we may pretend to admire,

* Vol. i. p. 64.

but

but whom no one can heartily love. But what Virgil has failed in, Oſſian, to our aſtoniſhment, has ſucceſsfully executed. His Fingal, though exhibited without any of the common human failings, is nevertheleſs a real man; a character which touches and intereſts every reader. To this it has much contributed, that the poet has repreſented him as an old man; and by this has gained the advantage of throwing around him a great many circumſtances, peculiar to that age, which paint him to the fancy in a more diſtinct light. He is ſurrounded with his family; he inſtructs his children in the principles of virtue; he is narrative of his paſt exploits; he is venerable with the grey locks of age; he is frequently diſpoſed to moralize, like an old man, on human vanity and the proſpect of death. There is more art, at leaſt more felicity, in this, than may at firſt be imagined. For youth and old age, are the two ſtates of human life, capable of being placed in the moſt pictureſque lights. Middle age is more general and vague; and has fewer circumſtances peculiar to the idea of it. And when any object is in a ſituation, that admits it to be rendered particular, and to be cloathed with a variety of circumſtances, it always ſtands out more clear and full in poetical deſcription.

Beſides human perſonages, divine or ſupernatural agents are often introduced into epic poetry; forming what is called the machinery of it; which moſt critics hold to be an eſſential part. The marvellous, it muſt be admitted, has always a great

great charm for the bulk of readers. It gratifies the imagination, and affords room for ſtriking and ſublime deſcription. No wonder therefore, that all poets ſhould have a ſtrong propenſity towards it. But I muſt obſerve, that nothing is more difficult, than to adjuſt properly the marvellous with the probable. If a poet ſacrifice probability, and fill his work with extravagant ſupernatural ſcenes, he ſpreads over it an appearance of romance and childiſh fiction; he tranſports his readers from this world, into a phantaſtick, viſionary region; and loſes that weight and dignity which ſhould reign in epic poetry. No work, from which probability is altogether baniſhed, can make a laſting or deep impreſſion. Human actions and manners, are always the moſt intereſting objects which can be preſented to a human mind. All machinery, therefore, is faulty which withdraws theſe too much from view; or obſcures them under a cloud of incredible fictions. Beſides being temperately employed, machinery ought always to have ſome foundation in popular belief. A poet is by no means at liberty to invent what ſyſtem of the marvellous he pleaſes: He muſt avail himſelf either of the religious faith, or the ſuperſtitious credulity of the country wherein he lives; ſo as to give an air of probability to events which are moſt contrary to the common courſe of nature.

In theſe reſpects, Oſſian appears to me to have been remarkably happy. He has indeed followed the ſame courſe with Homer. For it is perfectly abſurd to imagine, as ſome critics have done, that Homer's

Homer's mythology was invented by him, in conſequence of profound reflections on the benefit it would yield to poetry. Homer was no ſuch refining genius. He found the traditionary ſtories on which he built his Iliad, mingled with popular legends, concerning the intervention of the gods; and he adopted theſe, becauſe they amuſed the fancy. Oſſian, in like manner, found the tales of his country full of ghoſts and ſpirits: It is likely he believed them himſelf; and he introduced them, becauſe they gave his poems that ſolemn and marvellous caſt, which ſuited his genius. This was the only machinery he could employ with propriety; becauſe it was the only intervention of ſupernatural beings, which agreed with the common belief of the country. It was happy; becauſe it did not interfere in the leaſt, with the proper diſplay of human characters and actions; becauſe it had leſs of the incredible, than moſt other kinds of poetical machinery; and becauſe it ſerved to diverſify the ſcene, and to heighten the ſubject by an awful grandeur, which is the great deſign of machinery.

As Oſſian's mythology is peculiar to himſelf, and makes a conſiderable figure in his other poems, as well as in Fingal, it may be proper to make ſome obſervations on it, independent of its ſubſerviency to epic compoſition. It turns for the moſt part on the appearances of departed ſpirits. Theſe, conſonantly to the notions of every rude age, are repreſented not as purely immaterial, but as thin airy forms, which can be viſible or inviſible at pleaſure; their voice is feeble; their arm is weak; but

they are endowed with knowledge more than human. In a ſeparate ſtate, they retain the ſame diſpoſitions which animated them in this life. They ride on the wind; they bend their airy bows; and purſue deer formed of clouds. The ghoſts of departed bards continue to ſing. The ghoſts of departed heroes frequent the fields of their former fame. "They reſt together in their caves, and "talk of mortal men. Their ſongs are of other "worlds. They come ſometimes to the ear of reſt, "and raiſe their feeble voice*." All this preſents to us much the ſame ſet of ideas, concerning ſpirits, as we find in the eleventh book of the Odyſſey, where Ulyſſes viſits the regions of the dead: And in the twenty-third book of the Iliad, the ghoſt of Patroclus, after appearing to Achilles, vaniſhes preciſely like one of Oſſian's, emitting a ſhrill, feeble cry, and melting away like ſmoke.

But though Homer's and Oſſian's ideas concerning ghoſts were of the ſame nature, we cannot but obſerve, that Oſſian's ghoſts are drawn with much ſtronger and livelier colours than thoſe of Homer. Oſſian deſcribes ghoſts with all the particularity of one who had ſeen and converſed with them, and whoſe imagination was full of the impreſſion they had left upon it. He calls up thoſe awful and tremendous ideas which the

——Simulacra modis pallentia miris,

are fitted to raiſe in the human mind; and which, in Shakeſpear's ſtyle, "harrow up the ſoul."

* See Vol. i. p. 35, 40, 147, 152, 303, 353.

Crugal's

Crugal's ghoſt, in particular, in the beginning of the ſecond book of Fingal, may vie with any appearance of this kind, deſcribed by any epic or tragic poet whatever. Moſt poets would have contented themſelves with telling us, that he reſembled, in every particular, the living Crugal; that his form and dreſs were the ſame, only his face more pale and ſad; and that he bore the mark of the wound by which he fell. But Oſſian ſets before our eyes a ſpirit from the inviſible world, diſtinguiſhed by all thoſe features, which a ſtrong aſtoniſhed imagination would give to a ghoſt. "A "dark-red ſtream of fire comes down from the hill. "Crugal ſat upon the beam; he that lately fell by "the hand of Swaran, ſtriving in the battle of he-"roes. His face is like the beam of the ſetting "moon. His robes are of the clouds of the hill. "His eyes are like two decaying flames. Dark "is the wound of his breaſt.——The ſtars dim-"twinkled through his form; and his voice was like "the ſound of a diſtant ſtream." The circumſtance of the ſtars being beheld, "dim-twinkling through "his form," is wonderfully picturesque; and conveys the moſt lively impreſſion of his thin and ſhadowy ſubſtance. The attitude in which he is afterwards placed, and the ſpeech put into his mouth, are full of that ſolemn and awful ſublimity, which ſuits the ſubject. "Dim, and in "tears, he ſtood and ſtretched his pale hand over "the hero. Faintly he raiſed his feeble voice, "like the gale of the reedy Lego.---My ghoſt, "O Connal! is on my native hills; but my corſe

" is on the ſands of Ullin. Thou ſhalt never " talk with Crugal, or find his lone ſteps in the " heath. I am light as the blaſt of Cromla; and " I move like the ſhadow of miſt. Connal, ſon " of Colgar! I ſee the dark cloud of death. It " hovers over the plains of Lena. The ſons of " green Erin ſhall fall. Remove from the field of " ghoſts.---Like the darkened moon he retired in " the midſt of the whiſtling blaſt."

Several other appearances of ſpirits might be pointed out, as among the moſt ſublime paſſages of Oſſian's poetry. The circumſtances of them are conſiderably diverſified; and the ſcenery always ſuited to the occaſion. " Oſcar ſlowly aſcends " the hill. The meteors of night ſet on the heath " before him. A diſtant torrent faintly roars. " Unfrequent blaſts ruſh through aged oaks. " The half-enlightened moon ſinks dim and red " behind her hill. Feeble voices are heard on " the heath. Oſcar drew his ſword." —— Nothing can prepare the fancy more happily for the awful ſcene that is to follow. " Trenmor " came from his hill, at the voice of his mighty " ſon. A cloud, like the ſteed of the ſtranger, " ſupported his airy limbs. His robe is of the miſt " of Lano, that brings death to the people. His " ſword is a green meteor, half-extinguiſhed. " His face is without form, and dark. He ſigh- " ed thrice over the hero: And thrice, the winds " of the night roared around. Many were his " words to Oſcar——He ſlowly vaniſhed, like a " miſt

" miſt that melts on the ſunny hill *." To appearances of this kind, we can find no parallel among the Greek or Roman poets. They bring to mind that noble deſcription in the book of Job: " In " thoughts from the viſions of the night, when " deep ſleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, " and trembling, which made all my bones to " ſhake. Then a ſpirit paſſed before my face. " The hair of my fleſh ſtood up. It ſtood ſtill; " but I could not diſcern the form thereof. An " image was before mine eyes. There was ſi- " lence; and I heard a voice---Shall mortal man " be more juſt than God †?"

As Oſſian's ſupernatural beings are deſcribed with a ſurprizing force of imagination, ſo they are introduced with propriety. We have only three ghoſts in Fingal: That of Crugal, which comes to warn the hoſt of impending deſtruction, and to adviſe them to ſave themſelves by retreat; that of Evirallin, the ſpouſe of Oſſian, which calls him to riſe and reſcue their ſon from danger; and that of Agandecca, which, juſt before the laſt engagement with Swaran, moves Fingal to pity, by mourning for the approaching deſtruction of her kinſmen and people. In the other poems, ghoſts ſometimes appear when invoked to foretell futurity; frequently, according to the notions of theſe times, they come as fore-runners of misfortune or death, to thoſe whom they viſit; ſometimes they inform their friends at a diſtance, of their own death; and ſometimes they are introduced to

* Vol. i. p. 143, 144. † Job iv. 13—17.

heighten the ſcenery on ſome great and ſolemn occaſion. "A hundred oaks burn to the wind; "and faint light gleams over the heath. The "ghoſts of Ardven paſs through the beam; and "ſhew their dim and diſtant forms. Comala "is half-unſeen on her meteor; and Hidallan is "ſullen and dim*."——"The awful faces of "other times, looked from the clouds of Cro-"na†."——"Fercuth! I ſaw the ghoſt of "night. Silent he ſtood on that bank; his robe "of miſt flew on the wind. I could behold his "tears. An aged man he ſeemed, and full of "thought‡."

The ghoſts of ſtrangers mingle not with thoſe of the natives. "She is ſeen; but not like the "daughters of the hill. Her robes are from the "ſtrangers land; and ſhe is ſtill alone§." When the ghoſt of one whom we had formerly known is introduced, the propriety of the living character is ſtill preſerved. This is remarkable in the appearance of Calmar's ghoſt, in the poem entitled The Death of Cuchullin. He ſeems to forebode Cuchullin's death, and to beckon him to his cave. Cuchullin reproaches him for ſuppoſing that he could be intimidated by ſuch prognoſtics. "Why "doſt thou bend thy dark eyes on me, ghoſt of "the car-borne Calmar! Would'ſt thou frighten "me, O Matha's ſon! from the battles of Cor-"mac? Thy hand was not feeble in war; neither "was thy voice for peace. How art thou chang-

* Vol. i. p. 138. † Vol. i. p. 126. ‡ Vol. i, p. 173. § Vol. i. p. 198.

"ed

" ed, chief of Lara! if now thou doſt adviſe to " fly!---Retire thou to thy cave: Thou art not " Calmar's ghoſt: He delighted in battle; and " his arm was like the thunder of heaven." Calmar makes no return to this ſeeming reproach: But, " He retired in his blaſt with joy; for he " had heard the voice of his praiſe*." This is preciſely the ghoſt of Achilles in Homer; who, notwithſtanding all the diſſatisfaction he expreſſes with his ſtate in the region of the dead, as ſoon as he had heard his ſon Neoptolemus praiſed for his gallant behaviour, ſtrode away with ſilent joy to rejoin the reſt of the ſhades†.

It is a great advantage of Oſſian's mythology, that it is not local and temporary, like that of moſt other ancient poets; which of courſe is apt to ſeem ridiculous, after the ſuperſtitions have paſſed away on which it was founded. Oſſian's mythology is, to ſpeak ſo, the mythology of human nature; for it is founded on what has been the popular belief, in all ages and countries, and under all forms of religion, concerning the appearances of departed ſpirits. Homer's machinery is always lively and amuſing; but far from being always ſupported with proper dignity. The indecent ſquabbles among his gods, ſurely do no honour to epic poetry. Whereas Oſſian's machinery has dignity upon all occaſions. It is indeed a dignity of the dark and awful kind; but this is proper; becauſe coincident with the ſtrain and ſpirit of the poetry. A light and gay mythology,

* Vol. i. p. 212. † Odyſſ. Lib. 11.

like Homer's, would have been perfectly unſuitable to the ſubjects on which Oſſian's genius was employed. But though his machinery be always ſolemn, it is not, however, always dreary or diſmal; it is enlivened, as much as the ſubject would permit, by thoſe pleaſant and beautiful appearances, which he ſometimes introduces, of the ſpirits of the hill. Theſe are gentle ſpirits; deſcending on ſun-beams; fair-moving on the plain; their forms white and bright; their voices ſweet; and their viſits to men propitious. The greateſt praiſe that can be given, to the beauty of a living woman, is to ſay, "She is fair as the ghoſt of the hill; when "it moves in a ſun-beam at noon, over the ſilence "of Morven *."——"The hunter ſhall hear my "voice from his booth. He ſhall fear, but love "my voice. For ſweet ſhall my voice be for my "friends; for pleaſant were they to me †."

Beſides ghoſts, or the ſpirits of departed men, we find in Oſſian ſome inſtances of other kinds of machinery. Spirits of a ſuperior nature to ghoſts are ſometimes alluded to, which have power to embroil the deep; to call forth winds and ſtorms, and pour them on the land of the ſtranger; to overturn foreſts, and to ſend death among the people ‡. We have prodigies too; a ſhower of blood; and when ſome diſaſter is befalling at a diſtance, the ſound of death heard on the ſtrings of Oſſian's harp §: all perfectly conſonant, not only to the peculiar ideas of nothern nations, but to

* Vol. i. p. 21. † Vol. i. p. 295. ‡ Vid. Vol. i. p. 56, 163, 19, 145, 252. § Vol. i. p. 88, 236.

the general current of a ſuperſtitious imagination in all countries. The deſcription of Fingal's airy hall, in the poem called Berrathon, and of the aſcent of Malvina into it, deſerves particular notice, as remarkably noble and magnificent. But above all, the engagement of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda, in Carric-thura, cannot be mentioned without admiration. I forbear tranſcribing the paſſage, as it muſt have drawn the attention of every one who has read the works of Oſſian. The undaunted courage of Fingal, oppoſed to all the terrors of the Scandinavian God; the appearance and the ſpeech of that awful ſpirit; the wound which he receives, and the ſhriek which he ſends forth, "as rolled into himſelf, he roſe upon the wind;" are full of the moſt amazing and terrible majeſty. I know no paſſage more ſublime in the writings of any uninſpired author. The fiction is calculated to aggrandize the hero; which it does to a high degree; nor is it ſo unnatural or wild a fiction, as might at firſt be thought. According to the notions of thoſe times, ſupernatural beings were material, and conſequently, vulnerable. The ſpirit of Loda was not acknowledged as a deity by Fingal; he did not worſhip at the ſtone of his power; he plainly conſidered him as the God of his enemies only; as a local deity, whoſe dominion extended no farther than to the regions where he was worſhiped; who had, therefore, no title to threaten him, and no claim to his ſubmiſſion. We know there are poetical precedents of great authority, for fictions fully as extravagant; and if

Homer

Homer be forgiven for making Diomed attack and wound in battle, the gods whom that chief himſelf worſhiped, Oſſian ſurely is pardonable for making his hero ſuperior to the god of a foreign territory*.

Notwithſtanding the poetical advantages which I have aſcribed to Oſſian's machinery, I acknowledge it would have been much more beautiful and perfect, had the author diſcovered ſome knowledge of a ſupream Being. Although his ſilence on this head has been accounted for by the learn-

* The ſcene of this encounter of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda is laid in Iniſtore, or the iſlands of Orkney; and in the deſcription of Fingal's landing there, it is ſaid, p. 276. "A rock bends along the coaſt with all its echoing wood. "On the top is the circle of Loda, with the moſſy ſtone of "power." In confirmation of Oſſian's topography, it is proper to accquaint the reader that in theſe iſlands, as I have been well informed, there are many pillars, and circles of ſtones, ſtill remaining, known by the name of the ſtones and circles of Loda, or Loden; to which ſome degree of ſuperſtitious regard is annexed to this day. Theſe iſlands, until the year 1468, made a part of the Daniſh dominions. Their ancient language, of which there are yet ſome remains among the natives, is called the Norſe; and is a dialect, not of the Celtic, but of the Scandinavian tongue. The manners and the ſuperſtitions of the inhabitants, are quite diſtinct from thoſe of the Highlands and weſtern iſles of Scotland. Their ancient ſongs too, are of a different ſtrain and character, turning upon magical incantations and evocations from the dead, which were the favourite ſubjects of the old Runic poetry. They have many traditions among them of wars in former times with the inhabitants of the weſtern iſlands,

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ed and ingenious tranſlator in a very probable manner, yet ſtill it muſt be held a conſiderable diſadvantage to the poetry. For the moſt auguſt and lofty ideas that can embelliſh poetry are derived from the belief of a divine adminiſtration of the univerſe: And hence the invocation of a ſupream Being, or at leaſt of ſome ſuperior powers who are conceived as preſiding over human affairs, the ſolemnities of religious worſhip, prayers preferred, and aſſiſtance implored on critical occaſions, appear with great dignity in the works of almoſt all poets as chief ornaments of their compoſitions. The abſence of all ſuch religious ideas from Oſſian's poetry, is a ſenſible blank in it; the more to be regretted, as we can eaſily imagine what an illuſtrious figure they would have made under the management of ſuch a genius as his; and how finely they would have been adapted to many ſituations which occur in his works.

After ſo particular an examination of Fingal, it were needleſs to enter into as full a diſcuſſion of the conduct of Temora, the other Epic Poem. Many of the ſame obſervations, eſpecially with regard to the great characteriſtics of heroic poetry, apply to both. The high merit, however, of Temora, requires that we ſhould not paſs it by without ſome remarks.

The ſcene of Temora, as of Fingal, is laid in Ireland; and the action is of a poſterior date. The ſubject is, an expedition of the hero, to dethrone and puniſh a bloody uſurper, and to reſtore the poſſeſſion of the kingdom to the poſterity of the lawful

lawful prince; an undertaking worthy of the juſtice and heroiſm of the great Fingal. The action is one, and compleat. The poem opens with the deſcent of Fingal on the coaſt, and the conſultation held among the chiefs of the enemy. The murder of the young prince Cormac, which was the cauſe of the war, being antecedent to the epic action, is introduced with great propriety as an epiſode in the firſt book. In the progreſs of the poem, three battles are deſcribed, which riſe in their importance above one another; the ſucceſs is various, and the iſſue for ſome time doubtful; till at laſt, Fingal brought into diſtreſs, by the wound of his great general Gaul, and the death of his ſon Fillan, aſſumes the command himſelf, and having ſlain the Iriſh king in ſingle combat, reſtores the rightful heir to his throne.

Temora has perhaps leſs fire than the other epic poem; but in return it has more variety, more tenderneſs, and more magnificence. The reigning idea, ſo often preſented to us of "Fingal in "the laſt of his fields," is venerable and affecting; nor could any more noble concluſion be thought of, than the aged hero, after ſo many ſucceſsful atchievements, taking his leave of battles, and with all the ſolemnities of thoſe times reſigning his ſpear to his ſon. The events are leſs crouded in Temora than in Fingal; actions and characters are more particularly diſplayed; we are let into the tranſactions of both hoſts; and informed of the adventures of the night as well as of the day. The ſtill pathetic, and the romantic ſcenery of ſeveral

of

of the night adventures, ſo remarkably ſuited to Oſſian's genius, occaſion a fine diverſity in the poem; and are happily contraſted with the military operations of the day.

In moſt of our author's poems, the horrors of war are ſoftened by intermixed ſcenes of love and friendſhip. In Fingal, theſe are introduced as epiſodes; in Temora, we have an incident of this nature wrought into the body of the piece; in the adventure of Cathmor and Sulmalla. This forms one of the moſt conſpicuous beauties of that poem. The diſtreſs of Sulmalla, diſguiſed and unknown among ſtrangers, her tender and anxious concern for the ſafety of Cathmor, her dream, and her melting remembrance of the land of her fathers; Cathmor's emotion when he firſt diſcovers her, his ſtruggles to conceal and ſuppreſs his paſſion, leſt it ſhould unman him in the midſt of war, though "his ſoul poured forth in ſecret, when he be-"held her fearful eye;" and the laſt interview between them, when overcome by her tenderneſs, he lets her know he had diſcovered her, and confeſſes his paſſion; are all wrought up with the moſt exquiſite ſenſibility and delicacy.

Beſides the characters which appeared in Fingal, ſeveral new ones are here introduced; and though, as they are all the characters of warriors, bravery is the predominant feature, they are nevertheleſs diverſified in a ſenſible and ſtriking manner. Foldath, for inſtance, the general of Cathmor, exhibits the perfect picture of a ſavage chieftain: Bold, and daring, but preſumptuous, cruel, and over-

overbearing. He is diſtinguiſhed, on his firſt appearance, as the friend of the tyrant Cairbar; "His ſtride is haughty; his red eye rolls in wrath." In his perſon and whole deportment, he is contraſted with the mild and wiſe Hidalla, another leader of the ſame army, on whoſe humanity and gentleneſs he looks with great contempt. He profeſſedly delights in ſtrife and blood. He inſults over the fallen. He is imperious in his counſels, and factious when they are not followed. He is unrelenting in all his ſchemes of revenge, even to the length of denying the funeral ſong to the dead; which, from the injury thereby done to their ghoſts, was in thoſe days conſidered as the greateſt barbarity. Fierce to the laſt, he comforts himſelf in his dying moments with thinking that his ghoſt ſhall often leave its blaſt to rejoice over the graves of thoſe he had ſlain. Yet Oſſian, ever prone to the pathetic, has contrived to throw into his account of the death, even of this man, ſome tender circumſtances; by the moving deſcription of his daughter Dardulena, the laſt of his race.

The character of Foldath tends much to exalt that of Cathmor, the chief commander, which is diſtinguiſhed by the moſt humane virtues. He abhors all fraud and cruelty, is famous for his hoſpitality to ſtrangers; open to every generous ſentiment, and to every ſoft and compaſſionate feeling. He is ſo amiable as to divide the reader's attachment between him and the hero of the poem; though our author has artfully managed it ſo, as to make Cathmor himſelf indirectly acknowledge Fingal's

Fingal's ſuperiority, and to appear ſomewhat apprehenſive of the event, after the death of Fillan, which he knew would call forth Fingal in all his might. It is very remarkable, that although Oſſian has introduced into his poems three compleat heroes, Cuchullin, Cathmor, and Fingal, he has, however, ſenſibly diſtinguiſhed each of their characters. Cuchullin is particularly honourable; Cathmor particularly amiable; Fingal wiſe and great, retaining an aſcendant peculiar to himſelf in whatever light he is viewed.

But the favourite figure in Temora, and the one moſt highly finiſhed, is Fillan. His character is of that ſort, for which Oſſian ſhews a particular fondneſs; an eager, fervent young warrior, fired with all the impatient enthuſiaſm for military glory, peculiar to that time of life. He had ſketched this in the deſcription of his own ſon Oſcar; but as he has extended it more fully in Fillan, and as the character is ſo conſonant to the epic ſtrain, though ſo far as I remember, not placed in ſuch a conſpicuous light by any other epic poet, it may be worth while to attend a little to Oſſian's management of it in this inſtance.

Fillan was the youngeſt of all the ſons of Fingal; younger, it is plain, than his nephew Oſcar, by whoſe fame and great deeds in war, we may naturally ſuppoſe his ambition to have been highly ſtimulated. Withal, as he is younger, he is deſcribed as more raſh and fiery. His firſt appearance is ſoon after Oſcar's death, when he was employed to watch the motions of the foe by night. In a converſation

verſation with his brother Oſſian, on that occaſion, we learn that it was not long ſince he began to lift the ſpear. "Few are the marks of my ſword in "battle; but my ſoul is fire *." He is with ſome difficulty reſtrained by Oſſian from going to attack the enemy; and complains to him, that his father had never allowed him any opportunity of ſignalizing his valour. "The king hath not remarked "my ſword; I go forth with the croud; I return "without my fame." Soon after, when Fingal according to cuſtom was to appoint one of his chiefs to command the army, and each was ſtanding forth, and putting in his claim to this honour, Fillan is preſented in the following moſt picturesque and natural attitude. "On his ſpear ſtood "the ſon of Clatho, in the wandering of his locks. "Thrice he raiſed his eyes to Fingal: his voice "thrice failed him as he ſpoke.—Fillan could not "boaſt of battles—at once he ſtrode away. Bent "over a diſtant ſtream he ſtood; the tear hung in "his eye. He ſtruck, at times, the thiſtle's head, "with his inverted ſpear †." No leſs natural and beautiful is the deſcription of Fingal's paternal emotion on this occaſion. "Nor is he unſeen of "Fingal. Side-long he beheld his ſon. He be-"held him with burſting joy. He hid the big "tear with his locks, and turned amidſt his "crouded ſoul." The command, for that day, being given to Gaul, Fillan ruſhes amidſt the thickeſt of the foe, ſaves Gaul's life, who is wounded by a random arrow, and diſtinguiſhes himſelf ſo

* Vol. ii. p. 30. † Vol. ii. p. 49.

in

in battle, that " the days of old return on Fingal's " mind, as he beholds the renown of his ſon. As " the ſun rejoices from the cloud, over the tree " his beams have raiſed, whilſt it ſhakes its lonely " head on the heath, ſo joyful is the king over " Fillan *." Sedate however and wiſe, he mixes the praiſe which he beſtows on him with ſome reprehenſion of his raſhneſs, " My ſon, I ſaw thy " deeds, and my ſoul was glad. Thou art brave, " ſon of Clatho, but headlong in the ſtrife. So " did not Fingal advance, though he never feared " a foe. Let thy people be a ridge behind thee; " they are thy ſtrength in the field. Then ſhalt " thou be long renowned, and behold the tombs " of thy fathers †."

On the next day, the greateſt and the laſt of Fillan's life, the charge is committed to him of leading on the hoſt to battle. Fingal's ſpeech to his troops on this occaſion is full of noble ſentiment; and where he recommends his ſon to their care, extremely touching. " A young beam is before " you; few are his ſteps to war. They are few, " but he is valiant; defend my dark-haired ſon. " Bring him back with joy; hereafter he may ſtand " alone. His form is like his fathers; his ſoul is " a flame of their fire ‡." When the battle begins, the poet puts forth his ſtrength to deſcribe the exploits of the young hero; who, at laſt encountering and killing with his own hand Foldath the oppoſite general, attains the pinnacle of glory.

* Vol. ii. p. 74. † Vol. ii. p. 82. ‡ Vol. ii. p. 113.

In what follows, when the fate of Fillan is drawing near, Oſſian, if any where, excells himſelf. Foldath being ſlain, and a general rout begun, there was no reſource left to the enemy but in the great Cathmor himſelf, who in this extremity deſcends from the hill, where, according to the cuſtom of thoſe princes, he ſurveyed the battle. Obſerve how this critical event is wrought up by the poet. "Wide ſpreading over echoing Lubar, the flight "of Bolga is rolled along. Fillan hung forward "on their ſteps; and ſtrewed the heath with dead. "Fingal rejoiced over his ſon.——Blue-ſhielded "Cathmor roſe.---Son of Alpin, bring the harp! "Give Fillan's praiſe to the wind; raiſe high his "praiſe in my hall, while yet he ſhines in war. "Leave, blue-eyed Clatho! leave thy hall! be-"hold that early beam of thine! The hoſt is "withered in its courſe. No farther look---it is "dark---light-trembling from the harp, ſtrike, "virgins! ſtrike the ſound*." The ſudden interruption, and ſuſpenſe of the narration on Cathmor's riſing from his hill, the abrupt burſting into the praiſe of Fillan, and the paſſionate apoſtrophe to his mother Clatho, are admirable efforts of poetical art, in order to intereſt us in Fillan's danger; and the whole is heightened by the immediately following ſimile, one of the moſt magnificent and ſublime that is to be met with in any poet, and which if it had been found in Homer, would have been the frequent ſubject of admiration to critics; "Fillan is like a ſpirit of heaven, that deſcends

* Vol. ii. p. 126.

"from

" from the ſkirt of his blaſt. The troubled ocean
" feels his ſteps, as he ſtrides from wave to wave.
" His path kindles behind him; iſlands ſhake
" their heads on the heaving ſeas."

But the poet's art is not yet exhauſted. The fall of this noble young warrior, or in Oſſian's ſtile, the extinction of this beam of heaven, could not be rendered too intereſting and affecting. Our attention is naturally drawn towards Fingal. He beholds from his hill the riſing of Cathmor, and the danger of his ſon. But what ſhall he do? " Shall
" Fingal riſe to his aid, and take the ſword of
" Luno? What then ſhould become of thy fame,
" ſon of white-boſomed Clatho? Turn not thine
" eyes from Fingal, daughter of Iniſtore! I ſhall
" not quench thy early beam.---No cloud of mine
" ſhall riſe, my ſon, upon thy ſoul of fire*." Struggling between concern for the fame, and fear for the ſafety of his ſon, he withdraws from the ſight of the engagement; and diſpatches Oſſian in haſte to the field, with this affectionate and delicate injunction. " Father of Oſcar!" addreſſing him by a title which on this occaſion has the higheſt propriety, " Father of Oſcar! lift the
" ſpear; defend the young in arms. But conceal
" thy ſteps from Fillan's eyes: He muſt not know
" that I doubt his ſteel."——Oſſian arrived too late.---But unwilling to deſcribe Fillan vanquiſhed, the poet ſuppreſſes all the circumſtances of the combat with Cathmor; and only ſhews us the dying hero. We ſee him animated to the end

* Vol. ii. p. 131.

with the ſame martial and ardent ſpirit; breathing his laſt in bitter regret for being ſo early cut off from the field of glory. "Oſſian, lay me in that "hollow rock. Raiſe no ſtone above me; leaſt "one ſhould aſk about my fame. I am fallen in "the firſt of my fields; fallen without renown. "Let thy voice alone, ſend joy to my flying ſoul. "Why ſhould the bard know where dwells the "early-fallen Fillan?*"——He who after tracing the circumſtances of this ſtory, ſhall deny that our bard is poſſeſſed of high ſentiment and high art, muſt be ſtrangely prejudiced indeed. Let him read the ſtory of Pallas in Virgil, which is of a ſimilar kind; and after all the praiſe he may juſtly beſtow on the elegant and finiſhed deſcription of that amiable author, let him ſay, which of the two poets unfold moſt of the human ſoul.——I wave inſiſting on any more of the particulars in Temora; as my aim is rather to lead the reader into the genius and ſpirit of Oſſian's poetry, than to dwell on all his beauties.

The judgment and art diſcovered in conducting works of ſuch length as Fingal and Temora, diſtinguiſh them from the other poems in this collection. The ſmaller pieces, however, contain particular beauties no leſs eminent. They are hiſtorical poems, generally of the elegiac kind; and plainly diſcover themſelves to be the work of the ſame author. One conſiſtent face of manners is every where preſented to us; one ſpirit of poetry reigns; the maſterly hand of Oſſian appears through-

* Vol. ii. p. 137.

out;

out; the ſame rapid and animated ſtyle; the ſame ſtrong colouring of imagination, and the ſame glowing ſenſibility of heart. Beſides the unity which belongs to the compoſitions of one man, there is moreover a certain unity of ſubject which very happily connects all theſe poems. They form the poetical hiſtory of the age of Fingal. The ſame race of heroes whom we had met with in the greater poems, Cuchullin, Oſcar, Connal and Gaul return again upon the ſtage; and Fingal himſelf is always the principal figure, preſented on every occaſion, with equal magnificence, nay riſing upon us to the laſt. The circumſtances of Oſſian's old age and blindneſs, his ſurviving all his friends, and his relating their great exploits to Malvina, the ſpouſe or miſtreſs of his beloved ſon Oſcar, furniſh the fineſt poetical ſituations that fancy could deviſe for that tender pathetic which reigns in Oſſian's poetry.

On each of theſe poems, there might be room for ſeparate obſervations, with regard to the conduct and diſpoſition of the incidents, as well as to the beauty of the deſcriptions and ſentiments. Carthon is a regular and highly finiſhed piece. The main ſtory is very properly introduced by Cleſſammor's relation of the adventure of his youth; and this introduction is finely heightened by Fingal's ſong of mourning over Moina; in which Oſſian, ever fond of doing honour to his father, has contrived to diſtinguiſh him, for being an eminent poet, as well as warrior. Fingal's ſong upon this occaſion, when " his thouſand Bards leaned forwards from

" their ſeats, to hear the voice of the King," is inferior to no paſſage in the whole book; and with great judgment put in his mouth, as the ſeriouſneſs, no leſs than the ſublimity of the ſtrain, is peculiarly ſuited to the Hero's character. In Darthula, are aſſembled almoſt all the tender images that can touch the heart of man; Friendſhip, love, the affections of parents, ſons, and brothers, the diſtreſs of the aged, and the unavailing bravery of the young. The beautiful addreſs to the moon, with which the poem opens, and the tranſition from thence to the ſubject, moſt happily prepare the mind for that train of affecting events that is to follow. The ſtory is regular, dramatic, intereſting to the laſt. He who can read it without emotion may congratulate himſelf, if he pleaſes, upon being completely armed againſt ſympathetic ſorrow. As Fingal had no occaſion of appearing in the action of this poem, Oſſian makes a very artful tranſition from his narration, to what was paſſing in the halls of Selma. The ſound heard there on the ſtrings of his harp, the concern which Fingal ſhows on hearing it, and the invocation of the ghoſts of their fathers, to receive the Heroes falling in a diſtant land, are introduced with great beauty of imagination to increaſe the ſolemnity, and to diverſify the ſcenery of the poem.

Carric-thura is full of the moſt ſublime dignity; and has this advantage of being more chearful in the ſubject, and more happy in the cataſtrophe than moſt of the other poems: Though tempered at the ſame time with epiſodes in that ſtrain of tender

der melancholy, which ſeems to have been the great delight of Oſſian and the Bards of his age. Lathmon is peculiarly diſtinguiſhed, by high generoſity of ſentiment. This is carried ſo far, particularly in the refuſal of Gaul, on one ſide, to take the advantage of a ſleeping foe; and of Lathmon, on the other, to overpower by numbers the two young warriors, as to recall into one's mind the manners of Chivalry; ſome reſemblance to which may perhaps be ſuggeſted by other incidents in this collection of Poems. Chivalry, however, took riſe in an age and country too remote from thoſe of Oſſian to admit the ſuſpicion that the one could have borrowed any thing from the other. So far as Chivalry had any real exiſtence, the ſame military enthuſiaſm, which gave birth to it in the feudal times, might, in the days of Oſſian, that is, in the infancy of a riſing ſtate, through the operation of the ſame cauſe, very naturally produce effects of the ſame kind on the minds and manners of men. So far as Chivalry was an ideal ſyſtem exiſting only in romance, it will not be thought ſurpriſing, when we reflect on the account before given of the Celtic Bards, that this imaginary refinement of heroic manners ſhould be found among them, as much, at leaſt, as among the *Trobadores*, or ſtrolling Provençal Bards, in the 10th or 11th century; whoſe ſongs, it is ſaid, firſt gave riſe to thoſe romantic ideas of heroiſm, which for ſo long a time enchanted Europe*. Oſſian's heroes have all the gallantry and generoſi-

* Vid. Huetius de origine fabularum Romanenſium.

ty of thoſe fabulous knights, without their extravagance; and his love ſcenes have native tenderneſs, without any mixture of thoſe forced and unnatural conceits which abound in tne old romances. The adventures related by our poet which reſemble the moſt thoſe of romance, concern women who follow their lovers to war diſguiſed in the armour of men; and theſe are ſo managed as to produce, in the diſcovery, ſeveral of the moſt intereſting ſituations; one beautiful inſtance of which may be ſeen in Carric-thura, and another in Calthon and Colmal.

Oithona preſents a ſituation of a different nature. In the abſence of her lover Gaul, ſhe had been carried off and raviſhed by Dunrommath. Gaul diſcovers the place where ſhe is kept concealed, and comes to revenge her. The meeting of the two lovers, the ſentiments and the behaviour of Oithona on that occaſion, are deſcribed with ſuch tender and exquiſite propriety, as does the greateſt honour both to the art and to the delicacy of our author: and would have been admired in any poet of the moſt refined age. The conduct of Croma muſt ſtrike every reader as remarkably judicious and beautiful. We are to be prepared for the death of Malvina, which is related in the ſucceeding Poem. She is therefore introduced in perſon; "ſhe has heard a voice in "a dream; ſhe feels the fluttering of her ſoul;" and in a moſt moving lamentation addreſſed to her beloved Oſcar, ſhe ſings her own Death Song. Nothing could be calculated with more art

to

to ſooth and comfort her, than the ſtory which Oſſian relates. In the young and brave Fovargormo, another Oſcar is introduced; his praiſes are ſung; and the happineſs is ſet before her of thoſe who die in their youth, "when their renown is around them; before the feeble behold "them in the hall, and ſmile at their trembling "hands."

But no where does Oſſian's genius appear to greater advantage, than in Berrathon, which is reckoned the concluſion of his ſongs, "The laſt "ſound of the Voice of Cona."

Qualis olor noto poſiturus littore vitam,
Ingemit, et mæſtis mulcens concentibus auras
Præſago queritur venientia funera cantu.

The whole train of ideas is admirably ſuited to the ſubject. Every thing is full of that inviſible world, into which the aged Bard believes himſelf now ready to enter. The airy hall of Fingal preſents itſelf to his view; "he ſees the cloud that "ſhall receive his ghoſt; he beholds the miſt that "ſhall form his robe when he appears on his hill;" and all the natural objects around him ſeem to carry the preſages of death. "The thiſtle ſhakes its "beard to the wind. The flower hangs its heavy "head---it ſeems to ſay, I am covered with the "drops of heaven; the time of my departure is "near, and the blaſt that ſhall ſcatter my leaves." Malvina's death is hinted to him in the moſt delicate manner by the ſon of Alpin. His lamentation over her, her apotheoſis, or aſcent to the habitation of heroes, and the introduction to the ſtory

ſtory which follows from the mention which Oſſian ſuppoſes the father of Malvina to make of him in the hall of Fingal, are all in the higheſt ſpirit of Poetry. "And doſt thou remember Oſſian, O "Toſcar ſon of Comloch? The battles of our "youth were many; our ſwords went together "to the field."——Nothing could be more proper than to end his ſongs with recording an exploit of the father of that Malvina, of whom his heart was now ſo full; and who, from firſt to laſt, had been ſuch a favourite object throughout all his poems.

The ſcene of moſt of Oſſians poems is laid in Scotland, or in the coaſt of Ireland oppoſite to the territories of Fingal. When the ſcene is in Ireland, we perceive no change of manners from thoſe of Oſſian's native country. For as Ireland was undoubtedly peopled with Celtic tribes, the language, cuſtoms, and religion of both nations were the ſame. They had been ſeparated from one another by migration, only a few generations, as it ſhould ſeem, before our poets age; and they ſtill maintained a cloſe and frequent intercourſe. But when the poet relates the expeditions of any of his heroes to the Scandinavian coaſt, or to the iſlands of Orkney, which were then part of the Scandinavian territory, as he does in Carric-thura, Sulmalla of Lumon, and Cathloda, the caſe is quite altered. Thoſe countries were inhabited by nations of the Teutonic deſcent, who in their manners and religious rites differed widely from the Celtæ; and it is curious and remarkable, to find

this difference clearly pointed out in the poems of Oſſian. His deſcriptions bear the native marks of one who was preſent in the expeditions which he relates, and who deſcribes what he had ſeen with his own eyes. No ſooner are we carried to Lochlin, or the iſlands of Iniſtore, than we perceive that we are in a foreign region. New objects begin to appear. We meet every where with the ſtones and circles of Loda, that is, Odin, the great Scandinavian deity. We meet with the divinations and inchantments, for which it is well known thoſe northern nations were early famous. "There, mixed with the murmur of waters, roſe "the voice of aged men, who called the forms of "night to aid them in their war *;" whilſt the Caledonian chiefs who aſſiſted them, are deſcribed as ſtanding at a diſtance, heedleſs of their rites. That ferocity of manners which diſtinguiſhed thoſe nations, alſo becomes conſpicuous. In the combats of their chiefs there is a peculiar ſavageneſs; even their women are bloody and fierce †. The ſpirit, and the very ideas of Regner Lodbrog, that northern ſcalder whom I formerly quoted, occur to us again. "The hawks," Oſſian makes one of the Scandinavian chiefs ſay, "ruſh from all "their winds; they are wont to trace my courſe. "—We rejoiced three days above the dead, and "called the hawks of heaven. They came from "all their winds, to feaſt on the foes of Annir ‡."

* See Vol. ii. p. 229. † Vol. ii. p. 230—232.
‡ Vol. ii. p. 270.

Diſ-

Diſmiſſing now the ſeparate conſideration of any of our author's works, I proceed to make ſome obſervations on his manner of writing, under the general heads of Deſcription, Imagery, and Sentiment.

A poet of original genius is always diſtinguiſhed by his talent for deſcription *. A ſecond rate writer diſcerns nothing new or peculiar in the object he means to deſcribe. His conceptions of it are vague and looſe; his expreſſions feeble; and of courſe the object is preſented to us indiſtinctly and as through a cloud. But a true Poet makes us imagine that we ſee it before our eyes: he catches the diſtinguiſhing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in ſuch a light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a lively imagination, which firſt receives a ſtrong impreſſion of the object; and then, by a proper ſelection of capital pictureſque circumſtances employed in deſcribing it, tranſmits that impreſſion in its full force to the imaginations of others. That Oſſian poſſeſſes this deſcriptive power in a high degree, we have a clear proof from the effect which his deſcriptions produce upon the imaginations of thoſe who read him with any degree of attention and taſte. Few poets are more intereſting. We contract an intimate acquaintance with his principal heroes. The characters, the manners, the face of the country become familiar;

* See the rules of poetical deſcription excellently illuſtrated by lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. chap. 21. Of narration and deſcription.

we

we even think we could draw the figure of his ghoſts: In a word, whilſt reading him, we are tranſported as into a new region, and dwell among his objects as if they were all real.

It were eaſy to point out ſeveral inſtances of exquiſite painting in the works of our author. Such, for inſtance, as the ſcenery with which Temora opens, and the attitude in which Cairbar is there preſented to us *; the deſcription of the young prince Cormac, in the ſame book †; and the ruins of Balclutha in Carthon ‡. "I have "ſeen the walls of Balclutha, but they were de- "ſolate. The fire had reſounded in the halls; "and the voice of the people is heard no more. "The ſtream of Clutha was removed from its "place by the fall of the walls. The thiſtle "ſhook there its lonely head: The moſs whiſtled "to the wind. The fox looked out from the "windows; the rank graſs of the wall waved "round his head. Deſolate is the dwelling of "Moina; ſilence is in the houſe of her fathers." Nothing alſo can be more natural and lively than the manner in which Carthon afterwards deſcribes how the conflagration of his city affected him when a child: "Have I not ſeen the fallen Balclutha? "And ſhall I feaſt with Comhal's ſon? Comhal! "who threw his fire in the midſt of my father's "hall! I was young, and knew not the cauſe "why the virgins wept. The columns of ſmoke "pleaſed mine eye, when they roſe above my

* Vol. i. p. 241, 242, 243. † Vol. i. p. 258.
‡ Vol. i. p. 186.

"walls:

" walls: I often looked back with gladneſs, when " my friends fled above the hill. But when the " years of my youth came on, I beheld the moſs " of my fallen walls. My ſigh aroſe with the morn- " ing; and my tears deſcended with night. Shall " I not fight, I ſaid to my ſoul, againſt the chil- " dren of my foes? And I will fight, O Bard! " I feel the ſtrength of my ſoul*." In the ſame poem, the aſſembling of the chiefs round Fingal, who had been warned of ſome impending danger by the appearance of a prodigy, is deſcribed with ſo many pictureſque circumſtances, that one imagines himſelf preſent in the aſſembly. " The " king alone beheld the terrible ſight, and he fore- " ſaw the death of his people. He came in ſi- " lence to his hall, and took his father's ſpear; the " mail rattled on his breaſt. The heroes roſe a- " round. They looked in ſilence on each other, " marking the eyes of Fingal. They ſaw the " battle in his face.——A thouſand ſhields are " placed at once on their arms; and they drew " a thouſand ſwords. The hall of Selma brighten- " ed around. The clang of arms aſcends. The " grey dogs howl in their place. No word is " among the mighty chiefs. Each marked the " eyes of the King; and half aſſumed his ſpear †."

It has been objected to Oſſian, that his deſcriptions of military actions are imperfect, and much leſs diverſified by circumſtances than thoſe of Homer. This is in ſome meaſure true. The amazing fertility of Homer's invention is no where

* Vol. i. p. 191. † Vol. i. p. 188.

ſo

ſo much diſplayed as in the incidents of his battles, and in the little hiſtory pieces he gives of the perſons ſlain. Nor indeed, with regard to the talent of deſcription, can too much be ſaid in praiſe of Homer. Every thing is alive in his writings. The colours with which he paints are thoſe of nature. But Oſſian's genius was of a different kind from Homer's. It led him to hurry towards grand objects rather than to amuſe himſelf with particulars of leſs importance. He could dwell on the death of a favorite hero: but that of a private man ſeldom ſtopped his rapid courſe. Homer's genius was more comprehenſive than Oſſian's. It included a wider circle of objects; and could work up any incident into deſcription. Oſſian's was more limited; but the region within which it chiefly exerted itſelf was the higheſt of all, the region of the pathetic and ſublime.

We muſt not imagine, however, that Oſſian's battles conſiſt only of general indiſtinct deſcription. Such beautiful incidents are ſometimes introduced, and the circumſtances of the perſons ſlain ſo much diverſified, as ſhow that he could have embelliſhed his military ſcenes with an abundant variety of particulars, if his genius had led him to dwell upon them. One man "is ſtretched in the duſt "of his native land; he fell, where often he had "ſpread the feaſt, and often raiſed the voice of "the harp *." The maid of Iniſtore is introduced, in a moving apoſtrophe, as weeping for another †; and a third, "as rolled in the duſt he

* Vol. i. p. 40. † Vol. i. p. 21.

"lifted

" lifted his faint eyes to the king," is remembered and mourned by Fingal as the friend of Agandecca *. The blood pouring from the wound of one who is ſlain by night, is heard " hiſſing on the half extinguiſhed oak," which had been kindled for giving light: Another, climbing a tree to eſcape from his foe, is pierced by his ſpear from behind; " ſhrieking, panting " he fell; whilſt moſs and withered branches pur- " ſue his fall, and ſtrew the blue arms of Gaul †." Never was a finer picture drawn of the ardour of two youthful warriors than the following: " I ſaw " Gaul in his armour, and my ſoul was mixed " with his: For the fire of the battle was in his " eyes; he looked to the foe with joy. We ſpoke " the words of friendſhip in ſecret; and the light- " ening of our ſwords poured together. We " drew them behind the wood, and tried the " ſtrength of our arms on the empty air ‡."

Oſſian is always conciſe in his deſcriptions, which adds much to their beauty and force. For it is a great miſtake to imagine, that a crowd of particulars, or a very full and extended ſtyle, is of advantage to deſcription. On the contrary, ſuch a diffuſe manner for the moſt part weakens it. Any one redundant circumſtance is a nuiſance. It encumbers and loads the fancy, and renders the main image indiſtinct. " Obſtat," as Quintilian ſays with regard to ſtyle, " quicquid non adjuvat." To be conciſe in deſcription, is one thing; and to

* Vol. i. p. 85. † Vol. i. p. 327. ‡ Vol. i. p. 321.

be

be general, is another. No deſcription that reſts in generals can poſſibly be good; it can convey no lively idea; for it is of particulars only that we have a diſtinct conception. But at the ſame time, no ſtrong imagination dwells long upon any one particular; or heaps together a maſs of trivial ones. By the happy choice of ſome one, or of a few that are the moſt ſtriking, it preſents the image more compleat, ſhows us more at one glance, than a feeble imagination is able to do, by turning its object round and round into a variety of lights. Tacitus is of all proſe writers the moſt conciſe. He has even a degree of abruptneſs reſembling our author: Yet no writer is more eminent for lively deſcription. When Fingal, after having conquered the haughty Swaran, propoſes to diſmiſs him with honour: "Raiſe to-morrow thy white ſails "to the wind, thou brother of Agandecca *!" he conveys, by thus addreſſing his enemy, a ſtronger impreſſion of the emotions then paſſing within his mind, than if whole paragraphs had been ſpent in deſcribing the conflict between reſentment againſt Swaran and the tender remembrance of his ancient love. No amplification is needed to give us the moſt full idea of a hardy veteran, after the few following words: "His "ſhield is marked with the ſtrokes of battle; his "red eye deſpiſes danger †." When Oſcar, left alone, was ſurrounded by foes, "he ſtood," it is ſaid, "growing in his place, like the flood of the "narrow vale ‡;" a happy repreſentation of one,

* Vol. i. p. 115. † Vol. i. p. 244. ‡ Vol. i. p. 146.

who, by daring intrepidity in the midſt of danger, ſeems to increaſe in his appearance, and becomes more formidable every moment, like the ſudden riſing of the torrent hemmed in by the valley. And a whole crowd of ideas, concerning the circumſtances of domeſtic ſorrow occaſioned by a young warrior's firſt going forth to battle, is poured upon the mind by theſe words; "Calmar leaned "on his father's ſpear; that ſpear which he brought "from Lara's hall, when the ſoul of his mother "was ſad *."

The conciſeneſs of Oſſian's deſcriptions is the more proper on account of his ſubjects. Deſcriptions of gay and ſmiling ſcenes may, without any diſadvantage, be amplified and prolonged. Force is not the predominant quality expected in theſe. The deſcription may be weakened by being diffuſe, yet notwithſtanding, may be beautiful ſtill. Whereas, with reſpect to grand, ſolemn and pathetic ſubjects, which are Oſſian's chief field, the caſe is very different. In theſe, energy is above all things required. The imagination muſt be ſeized at once, or not at all; and is far more deeply impreſſed by one ſtrong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteneſs of laboured illuſtration.

But Oſſian's genius, though chiefly turned towards the ſublime and pathetic, was not confined to it: In ſubjects alſo of grace and delicacy, he diſcovers the hand of a maſter. Take for an example the following elegant deſcription of Agan-

* Vol. i. p. 58.

decca,

decca, wherein the tenderneſs of Tibullus ſeems united with the majeſty of Virgil. "The daughter "of the ſnow overheard, and left the hall of her "ſecret ſigh. She came in all her beauty; like "the moon from the cloud of the Eaſt. Love-"lineſs was around her as light. Her ſteps were "like the muſic of ſongs. She ſaw the youth "and loved him. He was the ſtolen ſigh of her "ſoul. Her blue eyes rolled on him in ſecret: "And ſhe bleſt the chief of Morven*." Several other inſtances might be produced of the feelings of love and friendſhip painted by our author with a moſt natural and happy delicacy.

The ſimplicity of Oſſian's manner adds great beauty to his deſcriptions, and indeed to his whole Poetry. We meet with no affected ornaments; no forced refinement; no marks either in ſtyle or thought of a ſtudied endeavour to ſhine and ſparkle. Oſſian appears every where to be prompted by his feelings; and to ſpeak from the abundance of his heart. I remember no more than one inſtance of what can be called quaint thought in this whole collection of his works. It is in the firſt book of Fingal, where from the tombs of two lovers two lonely yews are mentioned to have ſprung, "whoſe branches wiſhed to meet on high †." This ſympathy of the trees with the lovers, may be reckoned to border on an Italian conceit; and it is ſomewhat curious to find this ſingle inſtance of that ſort of wit in our Celtic poetry.

* Vol. i. p. 53. † Vol. i. p. 27.

The "joy of grief," is one of Oſſian's remarkable expreſſions, ſeveral times repeated. If any one ſhall think that it needs to be juſtified by a precedent, he may find it twice uſed by Homer; in the Iliad, when Achilles is viſited by the ghoſt of Patroclus; and in the Odyſſey, when Ulyſſes meets his mother in the ſhades. On both theſe occaſions, the heroes, melted with tenderneſs, lament their not having it in their power to throw their arms round the ghoſt, "that we might," ſay they, "in a mutual embrace, enjoy the delight of "grief."

——χρυεροῖο τεταρπώμεσθα γόοιο *.

But in truth the expreſſion ſtands in need of no defence from authority; for it is a natural and juſt expreſſion; and conveys a clear idea of that gratification, which a virtuous heart often feels in the indulgence of a tender melancholy. Oſſian makes a very proper diſtinction between this gratification, and the deſtructive effect of overpowering grief. "There is a joy in grief, when peace dwells in "the breaſts of the ſad. But ſorrow waſtes the "mournful, O daughter of Toſcar, and their "days are few†." To "give the joy of grief," generally ſignifies to raiſe the ſtrain of ſoft and grave muſick; and finely characteriſes the taſte of Oſſian's age and country. In thoſe days, when the ſongs of bards were the great delight of heroes, the tragic muſe was held in chief honour; gallant actions, and virtuous ſufferings, were the choſen

* Odyſſ. 11. 211. Iliad 23. 98. † Vol. i. p. 346.

theme;

theme; preferably to that light and trifling ſtrain of poetry and muſic, which promotes light and trifling manners, and ſerves to emaſculate the mind. "Strike the harp in my hall," ſaid the great Fingal, in the midſt of youth and victory, "Strike "the harp in my hall, and let Fingal hear the ſong. "Pleaſant is the joy of grief! It is like the ſhower "of ſpring, when it ſoftens the branch of the oak; "and the young leaf lifts its green head. Sing "on, O bards! To-morrow we lift the ſail*."

Perſonal epithets have been much uſed by all the poets of the moſt ancient ages: and when well choſen, not general and unmeaning, they contribute not a little to render the ſtyle deſcriptive and animated. Beſides epithets founded on bodily diſtinctions, akin to many of Homer's, we find in Oſſian ſeveral which are remarkably beautiful and poetical. Such as, Oſcar of the future fights, Fingal of the mildeſt look, Carril of other times, the mildly bluſhing Evirallin; Bragela, the lonely ſun-beam of Dunſcaich; a Culdee, the ſon of the ſecret cell.

But of all the ornaments employed in deſcriptive poetry, compariſons or ſimiles are the moſt ſplendid. Theſe chiefly form what is called the imagery of a poem: And as they abound ſo much in the works of Oſſian, and are commonly among the favourite paſſages of all poets, it may be expected that I ſhould be ſomewhat particular in my remarks upon them.

* Carric-thura, p. 270.

A poetical ſimile always ſuppoſes two objects brought together, between which there is ſome near relation or connection in the fancy. What that relation ought to be, cannot be preciſely defined. For various, almoſt numberleſs, are the analogies formed among objects, by a ſprightly imagination. The relation of actual ſimilitude, or likeneſs of appearance, is far from being the only foundation of poetical compariſon. Sometimes a reſemblance in the effect produced by two objects, is made the connecting principle: Sometimes a reſemblance in one diſtinguiſhing property or circumſtance. Very often two objects are brought together in a ſimile, though they reſemble one another, ſtrictly ſpeaking, in nothing, only becauſe they raiſe in the mind a train of ſimilar, and what may be called, concordant ideas; ſo that the remembrance of the one, when recalled, ſerves to quicken and heighten the impreſſion made by the other. Thus, to give an inſtance from our poet, the pleaſure with which an old man looks back on the exploits of his youth, has certainly no direct reſemblance to the beauty of a fine evening; farther than that both agree in producing a certain calm, placid joy. Yet Oſſian has founded upon this, one of the moſt beautiful compariſons that is to be met with in any poet. "Wilt thou not "liſten, ſon of the rock, to the ſong of Oſſian? "My ſoul is full of other times; the joy of my "youth returns. Thus, the ſun appears in the "weſt, after the ſteps of his brightneſs have moved "behind a ſtorm. The green hills lift their dewy "heads. The blue ſtreams rejoice in the vale.

"The

"The aged hero comes forth on his ſtaff; and his "grey hair glitters in the beam *." Never was there a finer group of objects. It raiſes a ſtrong conception of the old man's joy and elation of heart, by diſplaying a ſcene, which produces in every ſpectator, a correſponding train of pleaſing emotions; the declining ſun looking forth in his brightneſs after a ſtorm; the chearful face of all nature; and the ſtill life finely animated by the circumſtance of the aged hero, with his ſtaff and his grey locks; a circumſtance both extremely pictureſque in itſelf, and peculiarly ſuited to the main object of the compariſon. Such analogies and aſſociations of ideas as theſe, are highly pleaſing to the fancy. They give opportunity for introducing many a fine poetical picture. They diverſify the ſcene; they aggrandize the ſubject; they keep the imagination awake and ſprightly. For as the judgment is principally exerciſed in diſtinguiſhing objects, and remarking the differences among thoſe which ſeem like; ſo the higheſt amuſement of the imagination is to trace likeneſſes and agreements among thoſe which ſeem different.

The principal rules which reſpect poetical compariſons are, that they be introduced on proper occaſions, when the mind is diſpoſed to reliſh them; and not in the midſt of ſome ſevere and agitating paſſion, which cannot admit this play of fancy; that they be founded on a reſemblance neither too near and obvious, ſo as to give little amuſement to the imagination in tracing it, nor too faint and re-

* Vol. i. p. 305.

mote, ſo as to be apprehended with difficulty; that they ſerve either to illuſtrate the principal object, and to render the conception of it, more clear and diſtinct; or at leaſt, to heighten and embelliſh it, by a ſuitable aſſociation of images *.

Every country has a ſcenery peculiar to itſelf; and the imagery of a good poet will exhibit it. For as he copies after nature, his alluſions will of courſe be taken from thoſe objects which he ſees around him, and which have often ſtruck his fancy. For this reaſon, in order to judge of the propriety of poetical imagery, we ought to be, in ſome meaſure, acquainted with the natural hiſtory of the country where the ſcene of the poem is laid. The introduction of foreign images betrays a poet, copying not from nature, but from other writers. Hence ſo many Lions, and Tygers, and Eagles and Serpents, which we meet with in the ſimiles of modern poets; as if theſe animals had acquired ſome right to a place in poetical compariſons for ever, becauſe employed by ancient authors. They employed them with propriety, as objects generally known in their country; but they are abſurdly uſed for illuſtration by us, who know them only at ſecond hand, or by deſcription. To moſt readers of modern poetry, it were more to the purpoſe to deſcribe Lions or Tygers by ſimiles taken from men, than to compare men to Lions. Oſſian is very correct in this particular. His imagery is, without exception, copied from that face of nature, which he ſaw before his eyes; and by conſequence may

* See Elements of Criticiſm, ch. 19. vol. 3.

be

be expected to be lively. We meet with no Grecian or Italian ſcenery; but with the miſts, and clouds, and ſtorms of a northern mountainous region.

No poet abounds more in ſimiles than Oſſian. There are in this collection as many, at leaſt, as in the whole Iliad and Odyſſey of Homer. I am indeed inclined to think, that the works of both poets are too much crowded with them. Similes are ſparkling ornaments; and like all things that ſparkle, are apt to dazzle and tire us by their luſtre. But if Oſſian's ſimiles be too frequent, they have this advantage of being commonly ſhorter than Homer's; they interrupt his narration leſs; he juſt glances aſide to ſome reſembling object, and inſtantly returns to his former track. Homer's ſimiles include a wider range of objects. But in return, Oſſian's are, without exception, taken from objects of dignity, which cannot be ſaid for all thoſe which Homer employs. The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, Clouds and Meteors, Lightning and Thunder, Seas and Whales, Rivers, Torrents, Winds, Ice, Rain, Snow, Dews, Miſt, Fire and Smoke, Trees and Foreſts, Heath and Graſs and Flowers, Rocks and Mountains, Muſic and Songs, Light and Darkneſs, Spirits and Ghoſts; theſe form the circle, within which Oſſian's compariſons generally run. Some, not many, are taken from Birds and Beaſts; as Eagles, Sea Fowl, the Horſe, the Deer, and the Mountain Bee; and a very few from ſuch operations of art as were then known. Homer has diverſified his imagery

imagery by many more alluſions to the animal world; to Lions, Bulls, Goats, Herds of Cattle, Serpents, Inſects; and to the various occupations of rural and paſtoral life. Oſſian's defect in this article, is plainly owing to the deſert, uncultivated ſtate of his country, which ſuggeſted to him few images beyond natural inanimate objects, in their rudeſt form. The birds and animals of the country were probably not numerous; and his acquaintance with them was ſlender, as they were little ſubjected to the uſes of man.

The great objection made to Oſſian's imagery, is its uniformity, and the too frequent repetition of the ſame compariſons. In a work ſo thick ſown with ſimiles, one could not but expect to find images of the ſame kind ſometimes ſuggeſted to the poet by reſembling objects; eſpecially to a poet like Oſſian, who wrote from the immediate impulſe of poetical enthuſiaſm, and without much preparation of ſtudy or labour. Fertile as Homer's imagination is acknowledged to be, who does not know how often his Lions and Bulls and Flocks of Sheep, recur with little or no variation; nay, ſometimes in the very ſame words? The objection made to Oſſian is, however, founded, in a great meaſure, upon a miſtake. It has been ſuppoſed by inattentive readers, that wherever the Moon, the Cloud, or the Thunder, returns in a ſimile, it is the ſame ſimile, and the ſame Moon, or Cloud, or Thunder, which they had met with a few pages before. Whereas very often the ſimiles are widely different. The object, whence they are taken, is indeed in ſubſtance the ſame; but the image is

new;

new; for the appearance of the object is changed; it is preſented to the fancy in another attitude; and cloathed with new circumſtances, to make it ſuit the different illuſtration for which it is employed. In this, lies Oſſian's great art; in ſo happily varying the form of the few natural appearances with which he was acquainted, as to make them correſpond to a great many different objects.

Let us take for one inſtance the Moon, which is very frequently introduced into his compariſons; as in northern climates, where the nights are long, the Moon is a greater object of attention, than in the climate of Homer; and let us view how much our poet has diverſified its appearance. The ſhield of a warrior is like "the darkened moon when it "moves a dun circle through the heavens *." The face of a ghoſt, wan and pale, is like "the "beam of the ſetting moon †." And a different appearance of a ghoſt, thin and indiſtinct, is like "the new moon ſeen through the gathered miſt, "when the ſky pours down its flaky ſnow, and "the world is ſilent and dark ‡;" or in a different form ſtill, it is like "the watry beam of the "moon, when it ruſhes from between two clouds, "and the midnight ſhower is on the field §." A very oppoſite uſe is made of the moon in the deſcription of Agandecca: "She came in all her "beauty, like the moon from the cloud of the "Eaſt ‖." Hope, ſucceeded by diſappointment, is "joy riſing on her face, and ſorrow returning

* Vol. i. p. 42. † Vol. i. p. 32. ‡ Vol. i. p. 185. § Vol. i. p. 169. ‖ Vol. i. p. 54.

" again, like a thin cloud on the moon *." But when Swaran, after his defeat, is cheared by Fingal's generoſity, " His face brightened like the " full moon of heaven, when the clouds vaniſh " away, and leave her calm and broad in the " midſt of the ſky †." Venvela is " bright as the " moon when it trembles o'er the weſtern wave ‡;" but the ſoul of the guilty Uthal is " dark as the " troubled face of the moon, when it foretels the " ſtorm §." And by a very fanciful and uncommon alluſion, it is ſaid of Cormac, who was to die in his early years, " Nor long ſhalt thou lift the " ſpear, mildly ſhining beam of youth! Death " ſtands dim behind thee, like the darkened half of " the moon behind its growing light ‖."

Another inſtance of the ſame nature may be taken from miſt, which, as being a very familiar appearance in the country of Oſſian, he applies to a variety of purpoſes, and purſues through a great many forms. Sometimes, which one would hardly expect, he employs it to heighten the appearance of a beautiful object. The hair of Morna is " like the miſt of Cromla, when it curls on the " rock, and ſhines to the beam of the weſt ¶."— " The ſong comes with its muſick to melt and " pleaſe the ear. It is like ſoft miſt, that riſing " from a lake pours on the ſilent vale. The " green flowers are filled with dew. The ſun re-

* Vol. i. p. 169. † Vol. i. p. 117. ‡ Vol. i. p. 272. § Vol. i. p. 365. ‖ Vol. i. p. 206. ¶ Vol. i. p. 12.

" turns

" turns in its ſtrength, and the miſt is gone *."— But, for the moſt part, miſt is employed as a ſimilitude of ſome diſagreeable or terrible object. " The ſoul of Nathos was ſad, like the ſun in the " day of miſt, when his face is watery and dim †." " The darkneſs of old age comes like the miſt of " the deſert ‡." The face of a ghoſt is " pale as " the miſt of Cromla §." " The gloom of bat- " tle is rolled along as miſt that is poured on the " valley, when ſtorms invade the ſilent ſun-ſhine " of heaven ‖." Fame ſuddenly departing, is likened to " miſt that flies away before the ruſt- " ling wind of the vale ¶." A ghoſt, ſlowly vaniſhing, to " miſt that melts by degrees on the " ſunny hill **." Cairbar, after his treacherous aſſaſſination of Oſcar, is compared to a peſtilential fog. " I love a foe like Cathmor," ſays Fingal,

* Vol. i. p. 299. There is a remarkable propriety in this compariſon. It is intended to explain the effect of ſoft and mournful muſick. Armin appears diſturbed at a performance of this kind. Carmor ſays to him, " Why burſts " the ſigh of Armin? Is there a cauſe to mourn? The " ſong comes with its muſick to melt and pleaſe the ear. " It is like ſoft miſt, &c." that is, ſuch mournful ſongs have a happy effect to ſoften the heart, and to improve it by tender emotions, as the moiſture of the miſt refreſhes and nouriſhes the flowers; whilſt the ſadneſs they occaſion is only tranſient, and ſoon diſpelled by the ſucceeding occupations and amuſements of life: " The ſun returns in " its ſtrength, and the miſt is gone."

† Vol. i. p. 224. ‡ Vol. i. p. 227. § Vol. i. p. 75. ‖ Vol. i. p. 39. ¶ Vol. i. p. 117. ** Vol. i. p. 144.

" his

" his ſoul is great; his arm is ſtrong; his battles " are full of fame. But the little ſoul is like a " vapour that hovers round the marſhy lake. It " never riſes on the green hill, leſt the winds meet " it there. Its dwelling is in the cave; and it " ſends forth the dart of death *." This is a ſimile highly finiſhed. But there is another which is ſtill more ſtriking, founded alſo on miſt, in the 4th book of Temora. Two factious chiefs are contending; Cathmor the king interpoſes, rebukes and ſilences them. The poet intends to give us the higheſt idea of Cathmor's ſuperiority; and moſt effectually accompliſhes his intention by the following happy image. " They ſunk from the " king on either ſide; like two columns of morn- " ing miſt, when the ſun riſes between them, on " his glittering rocks. Dark is their rolling on " either ſide; each towards its reedy pool." Theſe inſtances may ſufficiently ſhew with what richneſs of imagination Oſſian's compariſons abound, and at the ſame time, with what propriety of judgment they are employed. If his field was narrow, it muſt be admitted to have been as well cultivated as its extent would allow.

As it is uſual to judge of poets from a compariſon of their ſimiles more than of other paſſages, it will perhaps be agreeable to the reader, to ſee how Homer and Oſſian have conducted ſome images of the ſame kind. This might be ſhewn in many inſtances. For as the great objects of nature are common to the poets of all nations, and make the

* Vol. i. p. 264.

general

general ſtore-houſe of all imagery, the ground-work of their compariſons muſt of courſe be frequently the ſame. I ſhall ſelect only a few of the moſt conſiderable from both poets. Mr. Pope's tranſlation of Homer can be of no uſe to us here. The parallel is altogether unfair between proſe, and the impoſing harmony of flowing numbers. It is only by viewing Homer in the ſimplicity of a proſe tranſlation, that we can form any compariſon between the two bards.

The ſhock of two encountering armies, the noiſe and the tumult of battle, afford one of the moſt grand and awful ſubjects of deſcription; on which all epic poets have exerted their ſtrength. Let us firſt hear Homer. The following deſcription is a favourite one, for we find it twice repeated in the ſame words *. "When now the conflicting "hoſts joined in the field of battle, then were "mutually oppoſed ſhields, and ſwords, and the "ſtrength of armed men. The boſſy bucklers "were daſhed againſt each other. The univerſal "tumult roſe. There were mingled the triumphant ſhouts and the dying groans of the victors and the vanquiſhed. The earth ſtreamed "with blood. As when winter torrents, ruſhing "from the mountains, pour into a narrow valley, "their violent waters. They iſſue from a thouſand ſprings, and mix in the hollowed channel. "The diſtant ſhepherd hears on the mountain, "their roar from afar. Such was the terror and the "ſhout of the engaging armies." In another paſ-

* Iliad iv. 446. and Il. viii. 60.

ſage,

ſage, the poet, much in the manner of Oſſian, heaps ſimile on ſimile, to expreſs the vaſtneſs of the idea, with which his imagination ſeems to labour. "With a mighty ſhout the hoſts engage. "Not ſo loud roars the wave of ocean, when dri-"ven againſt the ſhore by the whole force of the "boiſterous north; not ſo loud in the woods of "the mountain, the noiſe of the flame, when "riſing in its fury to conſume the foreſt; not ſo "loud the wind among the lofty oaks, when the "wrath of the ſtorm rages; as was the clamour "of the Greeks and Trojans, when, roaring "terrible, they ruſhed againſt each other *."

To theſe deſcriptions and ſimiles, we may oppoſe the following from Oſſian, and leave the reader to judge between them. He will find images of the ſame kind employed; commonly leſs extended; but thrown forth with a glowing rapidity which characteriſes our poet. "As autumn's dark "ſtorms pour from two echoing hills, towards "each other, approached the heroes. As two "dark ſtreams from high rocks meet, and mix, and "roar on the plain; loud, rough, and dark in bat-"tle, meet Lochlin and Inisfail. Chief mixed his "ſtrokes with chief, and man with man. Steel "clanging, ſounded on ſteel. Helmets are cleft "on high; blood burſts and ſmoaks around.— "As the troubled noiſe of the ocean, when roll "the waves on high; as the laſt peal of the thun-"der of heaven, ſuch is the noiſe of battle †.— "As roll a thouſand waves to the rock, ſo Swa-

* Iliad xiv. 393. † Vol. i. p. 18.

"ran's

" ran's hoſt came on; as meets a rock a thouſand " waves, ſo Inisfail met Swaran. Death raiſes " all his voices around, and mixes with the ſound " of ſhields.—The field echoes from wing to wing, " as a hundred hammers that riſe by turns on the " red ſon of the furnace *.——As a hundred " winds on Morven; as the ſtreams of a hundred " hills; as clouds fly ſucceſſive over heaven; or " as the dark ocean aſſaults the ſhore of the deſart; " ſo roaring, ſo vaſt, ſo terrible, the armies mix- " ed on Lena's echoing heath †." In ſeveral of theſe images, there is a remarkable ſimilarity to Homer's; but what follows is ſuperior to any compariſon that Homer uſes on this ſubject. " The " groan of the people ſpread over the hills; it " was like the thunder of night, when the cloud " burſts on Cona; and a thouſand ghoſts ſhriek at " once on the hollow wind ‡." Never was an image of more awful ſublimity employed to heighten the terror of battle.

Both poets compare the appearance of an army approaching, to the gathering of dark clouds. " As when a ſhepherd," ſays Homer, " beholds " from the rock a cloud borne along the ſea by the " weſtern wind; black as pitch it appears from " afar, ſailing over the ocean, and carrying the " dreadful ſtorm. He ſhrinks at the ſight, and " drives his flock into the cave: Such, under the " Ajaces, moved on, the dark, the thickened " phalanx to the war §."—" They came," ſays

* Vol. i. p. 21. † Vol. i. p. 62. ‡ Ibid.
§ Iliad iv. 275.

Oſſian, " over the deſert like ſtormy clouds, when " the winds roll them over the heath; their edges " are tinged with lightening; and the echoing " groves foreſee the ſtorm *." The edges of the cloud tinged with lightning, is a ſublime idea; but the ſhepherd and his flock, render Homer's ſimile more pictureſque. This is frequently the difference between the two poets. Oſſian gives no more than the main image, ſtrong and full. Homer adds circumſtances and appendages, which amuſe the fancy by enlivening the ſcenery.

Homer compares the regular appearance of an army, to " clouds that are ſettled on the moun- " tain top, in the day of calmneſs, when the " ſtrength of the north wind ſleeps †." Oſſian, with full as much propriety, compares the appearance of a diſordered army, to " the moun- " tain cloud, when the blaſt hath entered its " womb; and ſcatters the curling gloom on every " ſide ‡." Oſſian's clouds aſſume a great many forms; and, as we might expect from his climate, are a fertile ſource of imagery to him. " The " warriors followed their chiefs, like the gather- " ing of the rainy clouds, behind the red meteors " of heaven §." An army retreating without coming to action, is likened to " clouds, that " having long threatened rain, retire ſlowly behind " the hills ‖." The picture of Oithona, after ſhe had determined to die, is lively and delicate. " Her ſoul was reſolved, and the tear was dried

* Vol. i. p. 55. † Iliad, v. 522. ‡ Vol. i. p. 311. § Vol. i. p. 7. ‖ Vol. i. p. 233.

" from

" from her wildly-looking eye. A troubled joy roſe " on her mind, like the red path of the lightning " on a ſtormy cloud *." The image alſo of the gloomy Cairbar, meditating, in ſilence, the aſſaſſination of Oſcar, until the moment came when his deſigns were ripe for execution, is extremely noble, and complete in all its parts. " Cairbar heard " their words in ſilence, like the cloud of a ſhower; " it ſtands dark on Cromla, till the lightning burſts " its ſide. The valley gleams with red light; " the ſpirits of the ſtorm rejoice. So ſtood the " ſilent king of Temora; at length his words are " heard †."

Homer's compariſon of Achilles to the Dog-Star, is very ſublime. " Priam beheld him ruſh- " ing along the plain, ſhining in his armour, like " the ſtar of autumn; bright are its beams, diſ- " tinguiſhed amidſt the multitude of ſtars in the " dark hour of night. It riſes in its ſplendor; " but its ſplendor is fatal; betokening to miſerable " men, the deſtroying heat ‡." The firſt appearance of Fingal, is, in like manner, compared by Oſſian, to a ſtar or meteor. " Fingal, tall in " his ſhip, ſtretched his bright lance before him. " Terrible was the gleam of his ſteel; it was like " the green meteor of death, ſetting in the heath " of Malmor, when the traveller is alone, and the " broad moon is darkened in heaven §." The hero's appearance in Homer, is more magnificent; in Oſſian, more terrible.

* Vol. i. p. 340. † Vol. i. p. 247. ‡ Iliad, xxii. 26. § Vol. i. p. 60.

A tree cut down, or overthrown by a ſtorm, is a ſimilitude frequent among poets for deſcribing the fall of a warrior in battle. Homer employs it often. But the moſt beautiful, by far, of his compariſons, founded on this object, indeed one of the moſt beautiful in the whole Iliad, is that on the death of Euphorbus. "As the young "and verdant olive, which a man hath reared "with care in a lonely field, where the ſprings of "water bubble around it; it is fair and flouriſhing; "it is fanned by the breath of all the winds, and "loaded with white bloſſoms; when the ſudden "blaſt of a whirlwind deſcending, roots it out "from its bed, and ſtretches it on the duſt*." To this, elegant as it is, we may oppoſe the following ſimile of Oſſian's, relating to the death of the three ſons of Uſnoth. "They fell, like "three young oaks which ſtood alone on the hill. "The traveller ſaw the lovely trees, and wondered "how they grew ſo lonely. The blaſt of the "deſert came by night, and laid their green heads "low. Next day he returned; but they were "withered, and the heath was bare†." Malvina's alluſion to the ſame object, in her lamentation over Oſcar, is ſo exquiſitely tender, that I cannot forbear giving it a place alſo. "I was a lovely tree in thy "preſence, Oſcar! with all my branches round "me. But thy death came, like a blaſt from the "deſert, and laid my green head low. The ſpring "returned with its ſhowers; but no leaf of mine

* Iliad, xvii. 53. † Vol. i. p. 238.

"aroſe."

" aroſe*." Several of Oſſian's ſimiles taken from trees, are remarkably beautiful, and diverſified with well choſen circumſtances; ſuch as that upon the death of Ryno and Orla: " They have fallen " like the oak of the deſart; when it lies acroſs a " ſtream, and withers in the wind of the moun- " tains†:" Or that which Oſſian applies to him- ſelf; " I, like an ancient oak in Morven, moul- " der alone in my place; the blaſt hath lopped " my branches away; and I tremble at the wings " of the north‡."

As Homer exalts his heroes by comparing them to gods, Oſſian makes the ſame uſe of compariſons taken from ſpirits and ghoſts. Swaran " roared " in battle, like the ſhrill ſpirit of a ſtorm that ſits " dim on the clouds of Gormal, and enjoys the " death of the mariner §." His people gathered around Erragon, " like ſtorms around the ghoſt " of night, when he calls them from the top of " Morven, and prepares to pour them on the land " of the ſtranger ‖." ——" They fell before my " ſon, like groves in the deſert, when an angry " ghoſt ruſhes through night, and takes their " green heads in his hand¶." In ſuch images, Oſſian appears in his ſtrength; for very ſeldom have ſupernatural beings been painted with ſo much ſublimity, and ſuch force of imagination, as by this poet. Even Homer, great as he is, muſt yield to him in ſimiles formed upon theſe. Take,

* Vol. i. p. 345. † Vol. i. p. 103. ‡ Vol. i. p. 266. § Vol. i. p. 20. ‖ Vol. i. p. 162. ¶ Vol. i. p. 252.

for inſtance, the following, which is the moſt remarkable of this kind in the Iliad. "Meriones "followed Idomeneus to battle, like Mars the "deſtroyer of men, when he ruſhes to war. "Terror, his beloved ſon, ſtrong and fierce, at- "tends him; who fills with diſmay, the moſt "valiant hero. They come from Thrace, armed "againſt the Ephyrians and Phlegyans; nor do "they regard the prayers of either; but diſpoſe of "ſucceſs at their will *." The idea here, is undoubtedly noble: but obſerve what a figure Oſſian ſets before the aſtoniſhed imagination, and with what ſublimely terrible circumſtances he has heightened it. "He ruſhed in the ſound of his "arms, like the dreadful ſpirit of Loda, when "he comes in the roar of a thouſand ſtorms, and "ſcatters battles from his eyes. He ſits on a cloud "over Lochlin's ſeas. His mighty hand is on "his ſword. The winds lift his flaming locks. "So terrible was Cuchullin in the day of his "fame †."

Homer's compariſons relate chiefly to martial ſubjects, to the appearances and motions of armies, the engagement and death of heroes, and the various incidents of war. In Oſſian, we find a greater variety of other ſubjects illuſtrated by ſimiles; particularly, the ſongs of bards, the beauty of women, the different circumſtances of old age, ſorrow, and private diſtreſs; which give occaſion to much beautiful imagery. What, for inſtance, can be more delicate and moving, than the fol-

* Iliad xiii. 298. † Vol. i. p. 213.

lowing

lowing ſimile of Oithona's, in her lamentation over the diſhonour ſhe had ſuffered? "Chief of "Strumon, replied the ſighing maid, why didſt "thou come over the dark blue wave to Nuath's "mournful daughter? Why did not I paſs away in "ſecret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair "head unſeen, and ſtrews its withered leaves on "the blaſt*?" The muſick of bards, a favourite object with Oſſian, is illuſtrated by a variety of the moſt beautiful appearances that are to be found in nature. It is compared to the calm ſhower of ſpring; to the dews of the morning on the hill of roes; to the face of the blue and ſtill lake †. Two ſimiles on this ſubject, I ſhall quote, becauſe they would do honour to any of the moſt celebrated claſſics. The one is; "Sit thou on the heath, O "bard! and let us hear thy voice; it is pleaſant "as the gale of the ſpring that ſighs on the hun-"ter's ear, when he wakens from dreams of joy, "and has heard the muſic of the ſpirits of the hill ‡." The other contains a ſhort, but exquiſitely tender image, accompained with the fineſt poetical paint-ing. "The muſic of Carryl was like the memory "of joys that are paſt, pleaſant and mournful to the "ſoul. The ghoſts of departed bards heard it from "Slimora's ſide. Soft ſounds ſpread along the "wood; and the ſilent valleys of night rejoice §." What a figure would ſuch imagery and ſuch ſcenery have made, had they been preſented to us, adorned

* Vol. i. p. 338. † Vid. p. 299, 27, 51, 270.
‡ Vol. i. p. 106. § Vol. i. p. 208.

with the ſweetneſs and harmony of the Virgilian numbers!

I have choſen all along to compare Oſſian with Homer, rather than Virgil, for an obvious reaſon. There is a much nearer correſpondence between the times and manners of the two former poets. Both wrote in an early period of ſociety; both are originals; both are diſtinguiſhed by ſimplicity, ſublimity, and fire. The correct elegance of Virgil, his artful imitation of Homer, the Roman ſtateline ſs which he every where maintains, admit no parallel with the abrupt boldneſs, and enthuſiaſtick warmth of the Celtic bard. In one article, indeed, there is a reſemblance. Virgil is more tender than Homer; and thereby agrees more with Oſſian; with this difference, that the feelings of the one are more gentle and poliſhed, thoſe of the other more ſtrong; the tenderneſs of Virgil ſoftens, that of Oſſian diſſolves and overcomes the heart.

A reſemblance may be ſometimes obſerved between Oſſian's compariſons, and thoſe employed by the ſacred writers. They abound much in this figure, and they uſe it with the utmoſt propriety *. The imagery of Scripture exhibits a ſoil and climate altogether different from thoſe of Oſſian; a warmer country, a more ſmiling face of nature, the arts of agriculture and of rural life much farther advanced. The wine preſs, and the threſhing floor, are often preſented to us, the Cedar and the Palm-tree, the fragrance of perfumes, the voice of the Turtle, and the beds of Lillies. The

* See Dr. Lowth de Sacra Poeſi Hebræorum.

ſimiles

ſimiles are, like Oſſian's, generally ſhort, touching on one point of reſemblance, rather than ſpread out into little epiſodes. In the following example may be perceived what inexpreſſible grandeur poetry receives from the intervention of the Deity. "The nations ſhall ruſh like the ruſhings of many "waters; but God ſhall rebuke them, and they "ſhall fly far off, and ſhall be chaſed as the chaff "of the mountains before the wind, and like "the down of the thiſtle before the whirlwind*."

Beſides formal compariſons, the poetry of Oſſian is embelliſhed with many beautiful metaphors: Such as that remarkably fine one applied to Deugala; "She was covered with the light of beauty; "but her heart was the houſe of pride†." This mode of expreſſion, which ſuppreſſes the mark of compariſon, and ſubſtitutes a figured deſcription in room of the object deſcribed, is a great enlivener of ſtyle. It denotes that glow and rapidity of fancy, which without pauſing to form a regular ſimile, paints the object at one ſtroke. "Thou "art to me the beam of the eaſt, riſing in a land "unknown‡."—"In peace, thou art the gale of "ſpring; in war, the mountain ſtorm §."—— "Pleaſant be thy reſt, O lovely beam, ſoon haſt "thou ſet on our hills! The ſteps of thy depar-"ture were ſtately, like the moon on the blue "trembling wave. But thou haſt left us in dark-"neſs, firſt of the maids of Lutha!—Soon haſt "thou ſet Malvina! but thou riſeſt, like the beam

* Iſaiah xvii. 13. † Vol. i. p. 44. ‡ Vol. i. p. 338. § Vol. i. p. 116.

"of

" of the eaſt, among the ſpirits of thy friends, " where they ſit in their ſtormy halls, the cham- " bers of the thunder *." This is correct and finely ſupported. But in the following inſtance, the metaphor, though very beautiful at the beginning, becomes imperfect before it cloſes, by being improperly mixed with the literal ſenſe. " Trathal " went forth with the ſtream of his people; but " they met a rock; Fingal ſtood unmoved; bro- " ken they rolled back from his ſide. Nor did " they roll in ſafety; the ſpear of the king pur- " ſued their flight †."

The hyperbole is a figure which we might expect to find often employed by Oſſian; as the undiſciplined imagination of early ages generally prompts exaggeration, and carries its objects to exceſs; whereas longer experience, and farther progreſs in the arts of life, chaſten mens ideas and expreſſions. Yet Oſſian's hyperboles appear not to me, either ſo frequent or ſo harſh as might at firſt have been looked for; an advantage owing no doubt to the more cultivated ſtate, in which, as was before ſhewn, poetry ſubſiſted among the ancient Celtæ, than among moſt other barbarous nations. One of the moſt exaggerated deſcriptions in the whole work, is what meets us at the beginning of Fingal, where the ſcout makes his report to Cuchullin of the landing of the foe. But this is ſo far from deſerving cenſure that it merits praiſe, as being, on that occaſion, natural and proper. The ſcout arrives, trembling and full of fears;

* Vol. i. p. 358. † Vol. i. p. 81.

and

and it is well known, that no paſſion diſpoſes men to hyperbolize more than terror. It both annihilates themſelves in their own apprehenſion, and magnifies every object which they view through the medium of a troubled imagination. Hence all thoſe indiſtinct images of formidable greatneſs, the natural marks of a diſturbed and confuſed mind, which occur in Moran's deſcription of Swaran's appearance, and in his relation of the conference which they held together; not unlike the report, which the affrighted Jewiſh ſpies made to their leader of the land of Canaan. "The land through "which we have gone to ſearch it, is a land that "eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the "people that we ſaw in it, are men of a great ſta-"ture: and there ſaw we giants, the ſons of Anak, "which come of the giants; and we were in our "own ſight as graſshoppers, and ſo were we in "their ſight*."

With regard to perſonifications, I formerly obſerved that Oſſian was ſparing, and I accounted for his being ſo. Allegorical perſonages he has none; and their abſence is not to be regretted. For the intermixture of thoſe ſhadowy Beings, which have not the ſupport even of mythological or legendary belief, with human actors, ſeldom produces a good effect. The fiction becomes too viſible and phantaſtick; and overthrows that impreſſion of reality, which the probable recital of human actions is calculated to make upon the mind. In the ſerious and pathetick ſcenes of Oſſian eſpecially, allego-

* Numbers xiii. 32, 33.

rical

rical characters would have been as much out of place, as in Tragedy; ſerving only unſeaſonably to amuſe the fancy, whilſt they ſtopped the current, and weakened the force of paſſion.

With apoſtrophes, or addreſſes to perſons abſent or dead, which have been, in all ages, the language of paſſion, our poet abounds; and they are among his higheſt beauties. Witneſs the apoſtrophe, in the firſt book of Fingal, to the maid of Iniſtore, whoſe lover had fallen in battle; and that inimitably fine one of Cuchullin to Bragela at the concluſion of the ſame book. He commands the harp to be ſtruck in her praiſe; and the mention of Bragela's name, immediately ſuggeſting to him a crowd of tender ideas; "Doſt thou "raiſe thy fair face from the rocks," he exclaims, "to find the ſails of Cuchullin? The ſea is rolling "far diſtant, and its white foam ſhall deceive thee "for my ſails." And now his imagination being wrought up to conceive her as, at that moment, really in this ſituation, he becomes afraid of the harm ſhe may receive from the inclemency of the night; and with an enthuſiaſm, happy and affecting, though beyond the cautious ſtrain of modern poetry, "Retire," he proceeds, "retire, for it is "night, my love, and the dark winds ſigh in thy "hair. Retire to the hall of my feaſts, and think "of the times that are paſt; for I will not return "till the ſtorm of war has ceaſed. O Connal, ſpeak "of wars and arms, and ſend her from my mind; "for lovely with her raven hair is the white-boſomed daughter of Sorglan*." This breathes all the native ſpirit of paſſion and tenderneſs.

* Vol. i. p. 27.

The

The addreſſes to the ſun *, to the moon †, and to the evening ſtar ‡, muſt draw the attention of every reader of taſte, as among the moſt ſplendid ornaments of this collection. The beauties of each are too great, and too obvious to need any particular comment. In one paſſage only of the addreſs to the moon, there appears ſome obſcurity. "Whither doſt thou retire from thy "courſe, when the darkneſs of thy countenance "grows? Haſt thou thy hall like Oſſian? Dwelleſt "thou in the ſhadow of grief? Have thy ſiſters fal-"len from heaven? Are they who rejoiced with "thee at night, no more? Yes, they have fallen, "fair light! and thou doſt often retire to mourn." We may be at a loſs to comprehend, at firſt view, the ground of theſe ſpeculations of Oſſian, concerning the moon; but when all the circumſtances are attended to, they will appear to flow naturally from the preſent ſituation of his mind. A mind under the dominion of any ſtrong paſſion, tinctures with its own diſpoſition, every object which it beholds. The old bard, with his heart bleeding for the loſs of all his friends, is meditating on the different phaſes of the moon. Her waning and darkneſs, preſents to his melancholy imagination, the image of ſorrow; and preſently the idea ariſes, and is indulged, that, like himſelf, ſhe retires to mourn over the loſs of other moons, or of ſtars, whom he calls her ſiſters, and fancies to have once rejoiced with her at night, now fallen from heaven.

* Vol. i. p. 200. † Vol. i. p. 218. ‡ Vol. i. p. 291.

Darkneſs

Darkneſs ſuggeſted the idea of mourning, and mourning ſuggeſted nothing ſo naturally to Oſſian, as the death of beloved friends. An inſtance preciſely ſimilar of this influence of paſſion, may be ſeen in a paſſage which has always been admired of Shakeſpear's King Lear. The old man on the point of diſtraction, through the inhumanity of his daughters, ſees Edgar appear diſguiſed like a beggar and a madman.

Lear. Didſt thou give all to thy daughters? And
art thou come to this?
Couldeſt thou leave nothing? Didſt thou give them
all?

Kent. He hath no daughters, Sir.

Lear. Death, traitor! nothing could have ſubdued nature,
To ſuch a lowneſs, but his unkind daughters.

King Lear, Act 3. Scene 5.

The apoſtrophe to the winds, in the opening of Darthula, is in the higheſt ſpirit of poetry. "But "the winds deceive thee, O Darthula: and deny "the woody Etha to thy ſails. Theſe are not thy "mountains, Nathos, nor is that the roar of thy "climbing waves. The halls of Cairbar are near, "and the towers of the foe lift their head.— "Where have ye been, ye ſouthern winds; when "the ſons of my love were deceived? But ye "have been ſporting on plains, and purſuing "the thiſtle's beard. O that ye had been ruſtling in the ſails of Nathos, till the hills of Etha "roſe! till they roſe in their clouds, and ſaw their "coming chief*." This paſſage is remarkable

* Vol. i. p. 220.

for

for the reſemblance it bears to an expoſtulation with the wood nymphs, on their abſence at a critical time; which, as a favourite poetical idea, Virgil has copied from Theocritus, and Milton has very happily imitated from both.

Where were ye, nymphs! when the remorſeleſs deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the ſteep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie;
Nor on the ſhaggy top of Mona, high,
Nor yet where Deva ſpreads her wizard ſtream *

Having now treated fully of Oſſian's talents, with reſpect to deſcription and imagery, it only remains to make ſome obſervations on his ſentiments. No ſentiments can be beautiful without being proper; that is, ſuited to the character and ſituation of thoſe who utter them. In this repect, Oſſian is as correct as moſt writers. His characters, as above obſerved, are in general well ſupported; which could not have been the caſe, had the ſentiments been unnatural or out of place. A variety of perſonages of different ages, ſexes, and conditions, are introduced into his poems; and they ſpeak and act with a propriety of ſentiment and behaviour, which it is ſurpriſing to find in ſo rude an age. Let the poem of Darthula, throughout, be taken as an example.

* Milton's Lycidas. See Theocrit. Idyll. I.
Πᾶ ποκ' ἄρ ἦσθ' ὄκα Δάφνις ἐτάκετο; πᾶ ποκα, Νυμφαι, &c.
And Virg. Eclog. 10.
Quæ nemora, aut qui vos ſaltus habuere, puellæ, &c.

But

But it is not enough that ſentiments be natural and proper. In order to acquire any high degree of poetical merit, they muſt alſo be ſublime and pathetick.

The ſublime is not confined to ſentiment alone. It belongs to deſcription alſo; and whether in deſcription or in ſentiment, imports ſuch ideas preſented to the mind, as raiſe it to an uncommon degree of elevation, and fill it with admiration and aſtoniſhment. This is the higheſt effect either of eloquence or poetry: And to produce this effect, requires a genius glowing with the ſtrongeſt and warmeſt conception of ſome object awful, great or magnificent. That this character of genius belongs to Oſſian, may, I think, ſufficiently appear from many of the paſſages I have already had occaſion to quote. To produce more inſtances, were ſuperfluous. If the engagement of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda, in Carric-thura; if the encounters of the armies, in Fingal; if the addreſs to the ſun, in Carthon; if the ſimiles founded upon ghoſts and ſpirits of the night, all formerly mentioned, be not admitted as examples, and illuſtrious ones too, of the true poetical ſublime, I confeſs myſelf entirely ignorant of this quality in writing.

All the circumſtances, indeed, of Oſſian's compoſition, are favourable to the ſublime, more perhaps than to any other ſpecies of beauty. Accuracy and correctneſs; artfully connected narration; exact method and proportion of parts, we may look for in poliſhed times. The gay and the beautiful, will appear to more advantage in the midſt of ſmiling ſcenery and pleaſurable themes. But

amidſt the rude ſcenes of nature, amidſt rocks and torrents and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the ſublime. It is the thunder and the lightning of genius. It is the offspring of nature, not of art. It is negligent of all the leſſer graces, and perfectly conſiſtent with a certain noble diſorder. It aſſociates naturally with that grave and ſolemn ſpirit, which diſtinguiſhes our author. For the ſublime, is an awful and ſerious emotion; and is heightened by all the images of Trouble, and Terror, and Darkneſs.

Ipſe pater, media nimborum in nocte, coruſcâ
Fulmina molitur dextrâ; quo maxima motu
Terra tremit; fugere feræ; & mortalia corda
Per gentes, humilis ſtravit pavor; ille, flagranti
Aut Atho, aut Rhodopen, aut alta Ceraunia telo
Dejicit.——— VIRG. Georg. I.

Simplicity and conciſeneſs, are never-failing characteriſtics of the ſtile of a ſublime writer. He reſts on the majeſty of his ſentiments, not on the pomp of his expreſſions. The main ſecret of being ſublime, is to ſay great things in few, and in plain words: For every ſuperfluous decoration degrades a ſublime idea. The mind riſes and ſwells, when a lofty deſcription or ſentiment is preſented to it, in its native form. But no ſooner does the poet attempt to ſpread out this ſentiment or deſcription, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the tranſport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the ſublime is gone. Hence the conciſe and ſimple ſtyle of Oſſian, gives

great advantage to his ſublime conceptions; and aſſiſts them in ſeizing the imagination with full power *.

Sublimity as belonging to ſentiment, coincides in a great meaſure with magnanimity, heroiſm, and generoſity of ſentiment. Whatever diſcovers human nature in its greateſt elevation; whatever beſpeaks a high effort of ſoul; or ſhews a mind ſuperior to pleaſures, to dangers, and to death, forms what may be called the moral or ſentimental ſublime. For this, Oſſian is eminently diſtinguiſhed. No poet maintains a higher tone of virtuous and noble ſentiment, throughout all his works. Particularly in all the ſentiments of Fingal, there is a grandeur and loftineſs proper to ſwell the mind

* The noted ſaying of Julius Cæſar, to the pilot in a ſtorm; "Quid times? Cæſarem vehis;" is magnanimous and ſublime. Lucan, not ſatisfied with this ſimple conciſeneſs, reſolved to amplify and improve the thought. Obſerve, how every time he twiſts it round, it departs farther from the ſublime, till, at laſt, it ends in tumid declamation.

Sperne minas, inquit, Pelagi, ventoque furenti
Trade ſinum. Italiam, ſi cœlo auctore, recuſas,
Me, pete. Sola tibi cauſa hæc eſt juſta timoris
Vectorem non noſſe tuum; quem numina nunquam
Deſtituunt; de quo male tunc fortuna meretur,
Cum poſt vota venit; medias perrumpe procellas
Tutelâ ſecure meâ. Coeli iſte fretique,
Non puppis noſtræ, labor eſt. Hanc Cæſare preſſam
A fluctu defendit onus.
——Quid tantâ ſtrage paratur,
Ignoras? Quærit pelagi cælique tumultu
Quid præſtet fortuna mihi.——

PHARSAL. V. 578.

with

with the higheſt ideas of human perfection. Wherever he appears, we behold the hero. The objects which he purſues, are always truly great; to bend the proud; to protect the injured; to defend his friends; to overcome his enemies by generoſity more than by force. A portion of the ſame ſpirit actuates all the other heroes. Valour reigns; but it is a generous valour, void of cruelty, animated by honour, not by hatred. We behold no debaſing paſſions among Fingal's warriors; no ſpirit of avarice or of inſult; but a perpetual contention for fame; a deſire of being diſtinguiſhed and remembered for gallant actions; a love of juſtice; and a zealous attachment to their friends and their country. Such is the ſtrain of ſentiment in the works of Oſſian.

But the ſublimity of moral ſentiments, if they wanted the ſoftening of the tender, would be in hazard of giving a hard and ſtiff air to poetry. It is not enough to admire. Admiration is a cold feeling, in compariſon of that deep intereſt, which the heart takes in tender and pathetick ſcenes; where, by a myſterious attachment to the objects of compaſſion, we are pleaſed and delighted, even whilſt we mourn. With ſcenes of this kind, Oſſian abounds; and his high merit in theſe, is inconteſtable. He may be blamed for drawing tears too often from our eyes; but that he has the power of commanding them, I believe no man, who has the leaſt ſenſibility, will queſtion. The general character of his poetry, is the heroic mixed with the elegiac ſtrain; admiration tempered with pity.

Ever fond of giving, as he expreſſes it, "the joy "of grief," it is viſible, that on all moving ſubjects, he delights to exert his genius; and accordingly, never were there finer pathetick ſituations, than what his works preſent. His great art in managing them lies in giving vent to the ſimple and natural emotions of the heart. We meet with no exaggerated declamation; no ſubtile refinements on ſorrow; no ſubſtitution of deſcription in place of paſſion. Oſſian felt ſtrongly himſelf; and the heart when uttering its native language never fails, by powerful ſympathy, to affect the heart. A great variety of examples might be produced. We need only open the book to find them every where. What, for inſtance, can be more moving, than the lamentations of Oithona, after her misfortune? Gaul, the ſon of Morni, her lover, ignorant of what ſhe had ſuffered, comes to her reſcue. Their meeting is tender in the higheſt degree. He propoſes to engage her foe, in ſingle combat, and gives her in charge what ſhe is to do, if he himſelf ſhall fall. "And ſhall the daughter of Nuäth live, ſhe replied "with a burſting ſigh? Shall I live in Tromathon "and the ſon of Morni low? My heart is not of "that rock; nor my ſoul careleſs as that ſea, which "lifts its blue waves to every wind, and rolls be-"neath the ſtorm. The blaſt, which ſhall lay thee "low, ſhall ſpread the branches of Oithona on "earth. We ſhall wither together, ſon of car-"borne Morni! The narrow houſe is pleaſant to "me; and the grey ſtone of the dead; for never "more will I leave thy rocks, ſea-ſurrounded "Troma-

" Tromathon!——Chief of Strumon, why ca-
" meſt thou over the waves to Nuäth's mournful
" daughter? Why did not I paſs away in ſecret,
" like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair
" head unſeen, and ſtrews its withered leaves on
" the blaſt? Why didſt thou come, O Gaul! to
" hear my departing ſigh? —— O had I dwelt at
" Duvranna, in the bright beams of my fame!
" Then had my years come on with joy; and the
" virgins would bleſs my ſteps. But I fall in youth,
" ſon of Morni, and my father ſhall bluſh in his
" hall *."

Oithona mourns like a woman; in Cuchullin's expreſſions of grief after his defeat, we behold the ſentiments of a hero, generous but deſponding. The ſituation is remarkably fine. Cuchullin, rouzed from his cave, by the noiſe of battle, ſees Fingal victorious in the field. He is deſcribed as kindling at the ſight. " His hand is on the ſword of his
" fathers; his red-rolling eyes on the foe. He
" thrice attempted to ruſh to battle; and thrice
" did Connal ſtop him;" ſuggeſting, that Fingal was routing the foe; and that he ought not, by the ſhow of ſuperfluous aid, to deprive the king of any part of the honour of a victory, which was owing to him alone. Cuchullin yields to this generous ſentiment; but we ſee it ſtinging him to the heart with the ſenſe of his own diſgrace. " Then, Carril, go, replied the chief,
" and greet the king of Morven. When Lochlin
" falls away like a ſtream after rain, and the noiſe
" of the battle is over, then be thy voice ſweet in

* Vol. i. p. 338, 339, 343.

" his ear, to praiſe the king of ſwords. Give him " the ſword of Caithbat; for Cuchullin is worthy " no more to lift the arms of his fathers. But, " O ye ghoſts of the lonely Cromla! Ye ſouls of " chiefs that are no more! Be ye the companions " of Cuchullin, and talk to him in the cave of his " ſorrow. For never more ſhall I be renowned " among the mighty in the land. I am like a " beam that has ſhone: Like a miſt that has fled " away; when the blaſt of the morning came, " and brightened the ſhaggy ſide of the hill. " Connal! talk of arms no more: Departed is " my fame. My ſighs ſhall be on Cromla's wind, " till my footſteps ceaſe to be ſeen. And thou, " white-boſomed Bragela! mourn over the fall of " my fame; for vanquiſhed, I will never return " to thee, thou ſun-beam of Dunſcaich *!"

——————————Æſtuat Ingens
Uno in corde pudor, luctuſque, & conſcia virtus.

Beſides ſuch extended pathetick ſcenes, Oſſian frequently pierces the heart by a ſingle unexpected ſtroke. When Oſcar fell in battle, " No father " mourned his ſon ſlain in youth; no brother, his " brother of love; they fell without tears, for the " chief of the people was low †." In the admirable interview of Hector with Andromache, in the ſixth Iliad, the circumſtance of the child in his nurſe's arms, has often been remarked, as adding much to the tenderneſs of the ſcene. In the following paſſage relating to the death of Cuchullin, we find a circumſtance that muſt ſtrike the imagination

* Vol. i. p. 86. † Vol. i. p. 254.

with

with ſtill greater force. "And is the ſon of Semo "fallen? ſaid Carril with a ſigh. Mournful are "Tura's walls, and ſorrow dwells at Dunſcaich. "Thy ſpouſe is left alone in her youth; the ſon "of thy love is alone. He ſhall come to Bragela, "and aſk her why ſhe weeps. He ſhall lift his eyes "to the wall, and ſee his father's ſword. Whoſe "ſword is that? he will ſay; and the ſoul of his "mother is ſad*." Soon after Fingal had ſhewn all the grief of a father's heart for Ryno, one of his ſons, fallen in battle, he is calling, after his accuſtomed manner, his ſons to the chaſe. "Call," ſays he, "Fillan and Ryno—But he is not here— "My ſon reſts on the bed of death†."—This unexpected ſtart of anguiſh, is worthy of the higheſt tragic poet,

If ſhe come in, ſhe'll ſure ſpeak to my wife—
My wife!—my wife—What wife?—I have no wife—
Oh inſupportable! Oh heavy hour!

Othello, Act 5. Scene 7.

The contrivance of the incident in both poets is ſimilar; but the circumſtances are varied with judgment. Othello dwells upon the name of wife, when it had fallen from him, with the confuſion and horror of one tortured with guilt. Fingal, with the dignity of a hero, corrects himſelf, and ſuppreſſes his riſing grief.

The contraſt which Oſſian frequently makes between his preſent and his former ſtate, diffuſes over his whole poetry, a ſolemn pathetick air, which cannot fail to make impreſſion on every heart. The

* Vol. i. p. 214. † Vol. i. p. 119.

concluſion of the ſongs of Selma, is particularly calculated for this purpoſe. Nothing can be more poetical and tender, or can leave upon the mind, a ſtronger, and more affecting idea of the venerable aged bard. "Such were the words of the "bards in the days of the ſong; when the king "heard the muſic of harps, and the tales of other "times. The chiefs gathered from all their hills, "and heard the lovely ſound. They praiſed the "voice of Cona*; the firſt among a thouſand bards. "But age is now on my tongue, and my ſoul has "failed. I hear, ſometimes, the ghoſts of bards, "and learn their pleaſant ſong. But memory fails "on my mind; I hear the call of years. They "ſay, as they paſs along; Why does Oſſian ſing? "Soon ſhall he lie in the narrow houſe, and no "bard ſhall raiſe his fame. Roll on, ye dark-brown "years! for ye bring no joy in your courſe. Let "the tomb open to Oſſian, for his ſtrength has "failed. The ſons of the ſong are gone to reſt. "My voice remains, like a blaſt, that roars lonely "on a ſea-ſurrounded rock, after the winds are "laid. The dark moſs whiſtles there, and the "diſtant mariner ſees the waving trees †."

Upon the whole; if to feel ſtrongly, and to deſcribe naturally, be the two chief ingredients in poetical genius, Oſſian muſt, after fair examination, be held to poſſeſs that genius in a high degree. The queſtion is not, whether a few improprieties may be pointed out in his works; whether this, or that paſſage, might not have been worked up with

* Oſſian himſelf is poetically called the voice of Cona.

† Vol. i. p. 302.

more

more art and ſkill, by ſome writer of happier times? A thouſand ſuch cold and frivolous criticiſms, are altogether indeciſive as to his genuine merit. But, has he the ſpirit, the fire, the inſpiration of a poet? Does he utter the voice of nature? Does he elevate by his ſentiments? Does he intereſt by his deſcriptions? Does he paint to the heart as well as to the fancy? Does he make his readers glow, and tremble, and weep? Theſe are the great characteriſticks of true poetry. Where theſe are found, he muſt be a minute critic indeed, who can dwell upon ſlight defects. A few beauties of this high kind, tranſcend whole volumes of faultleſs mediocrity. Uncouth and abrupt, Oſſian may ſometimes appear by reaſon of his conciſeneſs. But he is ſublime, he is pathetick, in an eminent degree. If he has not the extenſive knowledge, the regular dignity of narration, the fulneſs and accuracy of deſcription, which we find in Homer and Virgil, yet in ſtrength of imagination, in grandeur of ſentiment, in native majeſty of paſſion, he is fully their equal. If he flows not always like a clear ſtream, yet he breaks forth often like a torrent of fire. Of art too, he is far from being deſtitute; and his imagination is remarkable for delicacy as well as ſtrength. Seldom or never is he either trifling or tedious; and if he be thought too melancholy, yet he is always moral. Though his merit were in other reſpects much leſs than it is, this alone ought to entitle him to high regard, that his writings are remarkably favourable to virtue. They awake the tendereſt ſympathies, and inſpire the moſt generous emotions.

emotions. No reader can riſe from him, without being warmed with the ſentiments of humanity, virtue and honour.

Though unacquainted with the original language, there is no one but muſt judge the tranſlation to deſerve the higheſt praiſe, on account of its beauty and elegance. Of its faithfulneſs and accuracy, I have been aſſured by perſons ſkilled in the Galic tongue, who, from their youth, were acquainted with many of theſe poems of Oſſian. To transfuſe ſuch ſpirited and fervid ideas from one language into another; to tranſlate literally, and yet with ſuch a glow of poetry; to keep alive ſo much paſſion, and ſupport ſo much dignity throughout, is one of the moſt difficult works of genius, and proves the tranſlator to have been animated with no ſmall portion of Oſſian's ſpirit.

The meaſured proſe which he has employed, poſſeſſes conſiderable advantages above any ſort of verſification he could have choſen. Whilſt it pleaſes and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being, at the ſame time, freer from conſtraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the ſpirit of the original to be exhibited with more juſtneſs, force, and ſimplicity. Elegant however, and maſterly as Mr. Macpherſon's tranſlation is, we muſt never forget, whilſt we read it, that we are putting the merit of the original to a ſevere teſt. For, we are examining a poet ſtripped of his native dreſs: diveſted of the harmony of his own numbers. We know how much grace and energy the works of the Greek and Latin poets receive

receive from the charm of verſification in their original languages. If then, deſtitute of this advantage, exhibited in a literal verſion, Oſſian ſtill has power to pleaſe as a poet; and not to pleaſe only, but often to command, to tranſport, to melt the heart; we may very ſafely infer, that his productions are the offſpring of true and uncommon genius; and we may boldly aſſign him a place among thoſe, whoſe works are to laſt for ages.

APPEN-

APPENDIX.

THE ſubſtance of the preceding Diſſertation was originally delivered, ſoon after the firſt publication of Fingal, in the courſe of my lectures in the univerſity of Edinburgh; and, at the deſire of ſeveral of the hearers, was afterwards enlarged and given to the publick.

As the degree of antiquity belonging to the poems of Oſſian, appeared to be a point which might bear diſpute, I endeavoured, from internal evidence, to ſhow that theſe poems muſt be referred to a very remote period; without pretending to aſcertain preciſely the date of their compoſition. I had not the leaſt ſuſpicion, when this Diſſertation was firſt publiſhed, that there was any occaſion for ſupporting their authenticity, as genuine productions of the Highlands of Scotland, as tranſlations from the Galic language; not forgeries of a ſuppoſed tranſlator. In Scotland, their authenticity was never called in queſtion. I myſelf had particular reaſons to be fully ſatisfied concerning it. My knowledge of Mr. Macpherſon's perſonal honour and integrity, gave me full aſſurance of his being incapable of putting ſuch a groſs impoſition, firſt, upon his friends, and then upon the publick; and if this had not been ſufficient,

cient, I knew, beſides, that the manner in which theſe poems were brought to light, was entirely inconſiſtent with any fraud. An accidental converſation with a gentleman diſtinguiſhed in the literary world, gave occaſion to Mr. Macpherſon's tranſlating literally one or two ſmall pieces of the old Galic poetry. Theſe being ſhown to me and ſome others rendered us very deſirous of becoming more acquainted with that poetry. Mr. Macpherſon, afraid of not doing juſtice to compoſitions which he admired in the original, was very backward to undertake the taſk of tranſlating; and the publication of *The fragments of ancient poems*, was with no ſmall importunity extorted from him. The high reputation which theſe preſently acquired, made it he thought unjuſt that the world ſhould be deprived of the poſſeſſion of more, if more of the ſame kind could be recovered: And Mr. Macpherſon was warmly urged by ſeveral gentlemen of rank and taſte, to diſengage himſelf from other occupations, and to undertake a journey through the Highlands and Iſlands, on purpoſe to make a collection of thoſe curious remains of ancient genius. He complied with their deſire, and ſpent ſeveral months in viſiting thoſe remote parts of the country; during which time he correſponded frequently with his friends in Edinburgh, informed them of his progreſs, of the applications which he made in different quarters, and of the ſucceſs which he met with; ſeveral letters of his, and of thoſe who aſſiſted him in making diſcoveries paſſed through my hands; his undertaking was the object of conſiderable

ſiderable attention; and returning at laſt, fraught with the poetical treaſures of the north, he ſet himſelf to tranſlate under the eye of ſome who were acquainted with the Galic language, and looked into his manuſcripts; and by a large publication made an appeal to all the natives of the Highlands and Iſlands of Scotland, whether he had been faithful to his charge, and done juſtice to their well known and favourite poems.

Such a tranſaction certainly did not afford any favourable opportunity for carrying on an impoſture. Yet in England, it ſeems, an opinion has prevailed with ſome, that an impoſture has been carried on; that the poems which have been given to the world are not tranſlations of the works of any old Galic Bard, but modern compoſitions, formed, as it is ſaid, upon a higher plan of poetry and ſentiment than could belong to an age and a country reputed barbarous: And I have been called upon and urged to produce ſome evidence for ſatisfying the world that they are not the compoſitions of Mr. Macpherſon himſelf, under the borrowed name of Oſſian.

If the queſtion had been concerning manuſcripts brought from ſome diſtant or unknown region, with which we had no intercourſe; or concerning tranſlations from an Aſiatic or American language which ſcarce any body underſtood, ſuſpicions might naturally have ariſen, and an author's aſſertions have been anxiouſly and ſcrupulouſly weighed. But in the caſe of a literal tranſlation, profeſſed to be given of old traditionary poems of our own country; of poems aſſerted to be known in the original

original to many thouſand inhabitants of Great Britain, and illuſtrated too by many of their current tales and ſtories concerning them, ſuch extreme ſcepticiſm is altogether out of place. For who would have been either ſo hardy or ſo ſtupid, as to attempt a forgery which could not have failed of being immediately detected? Either the author muſt have had the influence to engage, as confederates in the fraud, all the natives of the Highlands and Iſlands, diſperſed as they are throughout every corner of the Britiſh dominions; or, we ſhould, long ere this time, have heard their united voice exclaiming, "Theſe are not our poems, nor "what we were ever accuſtomed to hear from our "bards or our fathers." Such remonſtrances would, at leaſt, have reached thoſe who dwell in a part of the country which is adjacent to the Highlands; and muſt have come loud to the ears of ſuch, eſpecially, as were known to be the promoters of Mr. Macpherſon's undertaking. The ſilence of a whole country in this caſe, and of a country, whoſe inhabitants are well known to be attached, in a remarkable degree, to all their own antiquities, is of as much weight as a thouſand poſitive teſtimonies. And ſurely, no perſon of common underſtanding would have adventured, as Mr. Macpherſon has done in his diſſertation on Temora, to engage in a controverſy with the whole Iriſh nation concerning theſe poems, and to inſiſt upon the honour of them being due to Scotland, if they had been mere forgeries of his own; which the Scots, in place of ſupporting ſo ridiculous a claim, muſt have inſtantly rejected.

But as reaſoning alone is apt not to make much impreſſion, where ſuſpicions have been entertained concerning a matter of fact, it was thought proper to have recourſe to expreſs teſtimonies. I have accordingly applied to ſeveral perſons of credit and honour, both gentlemen of fortune, and clergymen of the eſtabliſhed church, who are natives of the Highlands or Iſlands of Scotland, and well acquainted with the language of the country, deſiring to know their real opinion of the tranſlations publiſhed by Mr. Macpherſon. Their original letters to me, in return, are in my poſſeſſion. I ſhall give a fair and faithful account of the reſult of their teſtimony: And I have full authority to uſe the names of thoſe gentlemen for what I now advance.

I muſt begin with affirming, that though among thoſe with whom I have correſponded, ſome have had it in their power to be more particular and explicit in their teſtimony than others; there is not, however, one perſon, who inſinuates the moſt remote ſuſpicion that Mr. Macpherſon has either forged, or adulterated any one of the Poems he has publiſhed. If they make any complaints of him, it is on account of his having omitted other poems which they think of equal merit with any which he has publiſhed. They all, without exception, concur in holding his tranſlations to be genuine, and proceed upon their authenticity as a fact acknowledged throughout all thoſe Northern Provinces; aſſuring me that any one would be expoſed to ridicule among them, who ſhould call it in queſtion. I muſt obſerve,

that I had no motive to direct my choice of the perſons to whom I applied for information preferably to others, except their being pointed out to me, as the perſons in their different counties who were moſt likely to give light on this head.

With regard to the manner in which the originals of theſe poems have been preſerved and tranſmitted, which has been repreſented as ſo myſterious and inexplicable, I have received the following plain account: That until the preſent century, almoſt every great family in the Highlands had their own bard, to whoſe office it belonged to be maſter of all the poems and ſongs of the country; that among theſe poems the works of Oſſian are eaſily diſtinguiſhed from thoſe of later bards by ſeveral peculiarities in his ſtyle and manner; that Oſſian has been always reputed the Homer of the Highlands, and all his compoſitions held in ſingular eſteem and veneration; that the whole country is full of traditionary ſtories derived from his poems, concerning Fingal and his race of heroes, of whom there is not a child but has heard, and not a diſtrict in which there are not places pointed out famous for being the ſcene of ſome of their feats of arms; that it was wont to be the great entertainment of the Highlanders, to paſs the winter evenings in diſcourſing of the times of Fingal, and rehearſing theſe old poems, of which they have been all along enthuſiaſtically fond; that when aſſembled at their feſtivals, or on any of their publick occaſions, wagers were often laid who could repeat moſt of them, and to have ſtore of them in their memories, was both an honourable and a profitable acquiſition,

quiſition, as it procured them acceſs into the families of their great men; that with regard to their antiquity, they are beyond all memory or tradition; inſomuch that there is a word commonly uſed in the Highlands to this day, when they would expreſs any thing which is of the moſt remote or unknown antiquity, importing, that it belongs to the age of Fingal.

I am farther informed, that after the uſe of letters was introduced into that part of the country, the bards and others began early to commit ſeveral of theſe poems to writing; that old manuſcripts of them, many of which are now deſtroyed or loſt, are known and atteſted to have been in the poſſeſſion of ſome great families; that the moſt valuable of thoſe which remained, were collected by Mr. Macpherſon during his journey through that country; that though the poems of Oſſian, ſo far as they were handed down by oral tradition, were no doubt liable to be interpolated, and to have their parts disjoined and put out of their natural order, yet by comparing together the different oral editions of them (if we may uſe that phraſe) in different corners of the country, and by comparing theſe alſo with the manuſcripts which he obtained, Mr. Macpherſon had it in his power to aſcertain, in a great meaſure, the genuine original, to reſtore the parts to their proper order, and to give the whole to the publick in that degree of correctneſs, in which it now appears.

I am alſo acquainted, that if enquiries had been made fifty or threeſcore years ago, many more particulars concerning theſe poems might have been

learned, and many more living witneſſes have been produced for atteſting their authenticity; but that the manners of the inhabitants of the Highland counties have of late undergone a great change. Agriculture, trades, and manufactures, begin to take place of hunting, and the ſhepherd's life. The introduction of the buſy and laborious arts has conſiderably abated that poetical enthuſiaſm which is better ſuited to a vacant and indolent ſtate. The fondneſs of reciting their old poems decays; the cuſtom of teaching them to their children is fallen into deſuetude; and few are now to be found, except old men, who can rehearſe from memory any conſiderable parts of them.

For theſe particulars, concerning the ſtate of the Highlands and the tranſmiſſion of Oſſian's poems, I am indebted to the reverend and very learned and ingenious Mr. John Macpherſon, miniſter of Slate in the Iſland of Sky, and to the reverend Mr. Donald Macqueen miniſter of Kilmuir in Sky, Mr. Donald Macleod miniſter of Glenelg in Inverneſsſhire, Mr. Lewis Grant miniſter of Duthel in Inverneſsſhire, Mr. Angus Macneil miniſter of the Iſland of South Uiſt, Mr. Neil Macleod miniſter of Roſs, in the Iſland of Mull, and Mr. Alexander Macaulay chaplain to the 88th Regiment.

The honourable colonel Hugh Mackay of Bighouſe in the Shire of Sutherland, Donald Campbell of Airds in Argyleſhire, Eſq; Æneas Mackintoſh of Mackintoſh in Inverneſsſhire, Eſq; and Ronald Macdonell of Keappoch in Lochaber, Eſq; captain in the 87th regiment commanded by colonel Fraſer, all concur in teſtifying that Mr. Macpher-

Macpherſon's collection conſiſts of genuine Highland poems; known to them to be ſuch, both from the general report of the country where they live, and from their own remembrance of the originals. Colonel Mackay aſſerts very poſitively, upon perſonal knowledge, that many of the poems publiſhed by Mr. Macpherſon are true and faithful tranſlations. Mr. Campbell declares that he has heard many of them, and captain Macdonell that he has heard parts of every one of them, recited in the original language.

James Grant of Rothiemurchus, Eſq; and Alexander Grant, of Delrachny, Eſq; both in the Shire of Inverneſs, deſire to be named as vouchers for the poem of Fingal in particular. They remember to have heard it often in their younger days, and are poſitive that Mr. Macpherſon has given a juſt tranſlation of it.

Lauchlan Macpherſon of Strathmaſhie in Inverneſsſhire, Eſq; gives a very full and explicit teſtimony, from particular knowledge, in the following words: That in the year 1760, he accompanied Mr. Macpherſon during ſome part of his journey through the Highlands in ſearch of the poems of Oſſian; that he aſſiſted him in collecting them; that he took down from oral tradition, and tranſcribed from old manuſcripts by far the greateſt part of thoſe pieces Mr. Macpherſon has publiſhed; that ſince the publication he has carefully compared the tranſlation with the copies of the originals in his hands; and that he finds it amazingly literal, even to ſuch a degree as often to preſerve the cadence of the Galic verſification. He affirms,

that among the manuſcripts which were at that time in Mr. Macpherſon's poſſeſſion, he ſaw one of as old a date as the year 1410.

Sir James Macdonald of Macdonald, in the Iſland of Sky, Baronet, aſſured me, that after having made, at my deſire, all the enquires he could in his part of the country, he entertained no doubt that Mr. Macpherſon's collection conſiſted entirely of authentick Highland poems; that he had lately heard ſeveral parts of them repeated in the original, in the Iſland of Sky, with ſome variations from the printed tranſlation, ſuch as might naturally be expected from the circumſtances of oral tradition; and ſome parts, in particular the epiſode of Fainaſollis in the third book of Fingal, which agree literally with the tranſlation; and added, that he had heard recitations of other poems not tranſlated by Mr. Macpherſon, but generally reputed to be of Oſſian's compoſition, which were of the ſame ſpirit and ſtrain with ſuch as are tranſlated, and which he eſteemed not inferiour to any of them in ſublimity of deſcription, dignity of ſentiment, or any other of the beauties of poetry. This laſt particular muſt have great weight; as it is well known how much the judgment of Sir James Macdonald deſerves to be relied upon, in every thing that relates to literature and taſte.

The late reverend Mr. Alexander Macfarlane, miniſter of Arrachar in Dumbartonſhire, who was remarkably eminent for his profound knowledge in Galic learning and antiquities, wrote to me ſoon after the publication of Mr. Macpherſon's work, terming it, a maſterly tranſlation; informing me that

that he had often heard ſeveral of theſe poems in the original, and remarked many paſſages ſo particularly ſtriking beyond any thing he had ever read in any human compoſition, that he never expected to ſee a ſtrength of genius able to do them that juſtice in a tranſlation, which Mr. Macpherſon has done.

Norman Macleod of Macleod, in the Iſland of Sky, Eſq; Walter Macfarlane of Macfarlane in Dumbartonſhire, Eſq; Mr. Alexander Macmillan, deputy keeper of his Majeſty's ſignet, Mr. Adam Fergusſon, profeſſor of moral philoſophy in the Univerſity of Edinburgh, and many other gentlemen natives of the Highland counties, whom I had occaſion to converſe with upon this ſubject, declare, that though they cannot now repeat from memory any of theſe poems in the original, yet from what they have heard in their youth, and from the impreſſion of the ſubject ſtill remaining on their minds, they firmly believe thoſe which Mr. Macpherſon has publiſhed, to be the old poems of Oſſian current in the country.

Deſirous, however, to have this tranſlation particularly compared with the oral editions of any who had parts of the original diſtinctly on their memory, I applied to ſeveral clergymen to make enquiry in their reſpective pariſhes concerning ſuch perſons; and to compare what they rehearſed with the printed verſion. Accordingly, from the reverend Mr. John Macpherſon miniſter of Slate in Sky, Mr. Neil Macleod miniſter of Roſs in Mull, Mr. Angus Macneil miniſter of South Uiſt, Mr. Donald Macqueen miniſter of Kilmuir in

Sky, and Mr. Donald Macleod miniſter of Glenelg, I have had reports on this head, containing diſtinct and explicit teſtimonies to almoſt the whole epic poem of Fingal, from beginning to end, and to ſeveral alſo of the leſſer poems, as rehearſed in the original, in their preſence, by perſons whoſe names and places of abode they mention, and compared by themſelves with the printed tranſlation. They affirm that in many places, what was rehearſed in their preſence agreed literally and exactly with the tranſlation. In ſome places they found variations from it, and variations even among different rehearſers of the ſame poem in the original; as words and ſtanzas omitted by ſome which others repeated, and the order and connection in ſome places changed. But they remark, that theſe variations are on the whole not very material; and that Mr. Macpherſon ſeemed to them to follow the moſt juſt and authentic copy of the ſenſe of his author. Some of theſe clergymen, particularly Mr. Neil Macleod, can themſelves repeat from memory ſeveral paſſages of Fingal; the tranſlation of which they aſſure me is exact. Mr. Donald Macleod acquaints me, that it was in his houſe Mr. Macpherſon had the deſcription of Cuchullin's horſes and chariot, in the firſt book of of Fingal, given him by Allan Macaſkill ſchoolmaſter. Mr. Angus Macneil writes, that Mr. Macdonald, a pariſhioner of his, declares, that he has often ſeen and read a great part of an ancient manuſcript, once in the poſſeſſion of the family of Clanronald, and afterwards carried to Ireland, containing many of theſe poems; and that he rehearſed before

before him ſeveral paſſages out of Fingal, which agreed exactly with Mr. Macpherſon's tranſlation; that Neil Macmurrich, whoſe predeceſſors had for many generations been bards to the family of Clanronald, declared alſo in his preſence, that he had often ſeen and read the ſame old manuſcript; that he himſelf, gave to Mr. Macpherſon a manuſcript containing ſome of the poems which are now tranſlated and publiſhed, and rehearſed before Mr. Macneil, in the original, the whole of the poem entitled Dar-thula, with very little variation from the printed tranſlation. I have received the ſame teſtimony concerning this poem, Dar-thula, from Mr. Macpherſon miniſter of Slate; and in a letter communicated to me from Lieutenant Duncan Macnicol, of the 88th regiment, informing me of its being recited in the original, in their preſence, from beginning to end: On which I lay the more ſtreſs, as any perſon of taſte who turns to that poem will ſee, that it is one of the moſt highly finiſhed in the whole collection, and moſt diſtinguiſhed for poetical and ſentimental beauties; inſomuch, that whatever genius could produce Dar-thula, muſt be judged fully equal to any performance contained in Mr. Macpherſon's publication. I muſt add here, that though they who have compared the tranſlation with what they have heard rehearſed of the original, beſtow high praiſes both upon Mr. Macpherſon's genius and his fidelity; yet I find it to be their general opinion, that in many places he has not been able to attain to the ſtrength and ſublimity of the original which he copied.

I have

I have authority to ſay, in the name of Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Macnab of the 88th regiment, or regiment of Highland Voluntiers commanded by colonel Campbell, that he has undoubted evidence of Mr. Macpherſon's collection being genuine, both from what he well remembers to have heard in his youth, and from his having heard very lately a conſiderable part of the poem of Temora rehearſed in the original, which agreed exactly with the printed verſion.

By the reverend Mr. Alexander Pope miniſter of Reay, in the ſhire of Caithneſs, I am informed, that twenty-four years ago, he had begun to make a collection of ſome of the old poems current in his part of the country; on comparing which, with Mr. Macpherſon's work, he found in his collection the poem intitled, the battle of Lora, ſome parts of Lathmon, and the account of the death of Oſcar. From the above mentioned Lieutenant Duncan Macnicol, teſtimonies have been alſo received to a great part of Fingal, to part of Temora, and Carric-thura, as well as to the whole of Dar-thula, as recited in his preſence in the original, compared, and found to agree with the tranſlation.

I myſelf read over the greateſt part of the Engliſh verſion of the ſix books of Fingal, to Mr. Kenneth Macpherſon of Stornoway in the Iſland of Lewis, merchant, in preſence of the reverend Mr. Alexander Macaulay chaplain to the 88th regiment. In going along Mr. Macpherſon vouched what was read to be well known to him in the original, both the deſcriptions and the ſentiments. In ſome places, though

though he remembred the ſtory, he did not remember the words of the original; in other places, he remembered and repeated the Galic lines themſelves, which, being interpreted to me by Mr. Macaulay, were found, upon compariſon, to agree often literally with the printed verſion, and ſometimes with ſlight variations of a word or an epithet. This teſtimony carried to me, and muſt have carried to any other who had been preſent, the higheſt conviction; being preciſely a teſtimony of that nature which an Engliſhman well acquainted with Milton, or any favourite author, would give to a foreigner, who ſhewed him a verſion of this author into his own language, and wanted to be ſatisfied from what the Engliſhman could recollect of the original, whether it was really a tranſlation of Paradiſe Loſt, or a ſpurious work under that title which had been put into his hands.

The above-mentioned Mr. Alexander Macaulay, Mr. Adam Ferguſſon profeſſor of moral philoſophy, and Mr. Alexander Fraſer, governor to Francis Stuart, Eſq; inform me, that at ſeveral different times they were with Mr. Macpherſon, after he had returned from his journey through the Highlands, and whilſt he was employed in the work of tranſlating; that they looked into his manuſcripts, ſeveral of which had the appearance of being old; that they were fully ſatisfied of their being genuine Highland poems; that they compared the tranſlation in many places with the original; and they atteſt it to be very juſt and faithful, and remarkably literal.

It has been thought worth while to beſtow this attention on eſtabliſhing the authenticity of the works of Oſſian, now in poſſeſſion of the publick: Becauſe whatever rank they are allowed to hold as works of genius; whatever different opinions may be entertained concerning their poetical merit, they are unqueſtionably valuable in another view; as monuments of the taſte and manners of an ancient age, as uſeful materials for enlarging our knowledge of the human mind and character; and muſt, beyond all diſpute, be held as at leaſt, one of the greateſt curioſities, which have at any time enriched the republick of letters. More teſtimonies to them might have been produced by a more enlarged correſpondence with the Highland counties: But I apprehend, if any apology is neceſſary, it is for producing ſo many names, in a queſtion, where the conſenting ſilence of a whole country, was to every unprejudiced perſon, the ſtrongeſt proof, that ſpurious compoſitions, in the name of that country, had not been obtruded upon the world.

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AN

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ART of SPEAKING.

THAT *oratory* is an art of great conſequence, will hardly be queſtioned in our times, unleſs it be by thoſe, (if any are ſo ignorant) who do not know, that it has been taught, and ſtudied, in all countries, where learning has gained any ground, ever ſince the days of Ariſtotle. That the *manner* or *addreſs* of a ſpeaker, is of the utmoſt *importance*, and that a *juſt* and *pleaſing* manner in delivering either one's own compoſitions, or thoſe of others, is *difficult* of acquiſition, and but too much *neglected* amongſt us, ſeems unqueſtionable from the *deficiencies* we ſo commonly obſerve in the *addreſs* of our public ſpeakers, much more than in the *matter* uttered by them, and from the little *effect* produced by their labours.

Of the *learning* neceſſary for furniſhing *matter*, and of the art of *arranging* it properly; of *invention*, *compoſition*, and *ſtyle*, various writers among the Greeks, Romans, French, Italians, and Engliſh, have treated very copiouſly. It is not my deſign to trouble the world with any thing on theſe branches of oratory. I ſhall confine myſelf merely to what the prince of orators pronounced to be the firſt, ſecond, and

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third part, or all that is *moſt important* in the art, viz. *delivery*, comprehending what every gentleman ought to be maſter of reſpecting *geſture*, *looks*, and command of *voice*.

What is true of moſt of the improvements, which are made by ſtudy, or culture, is peculiarly ſo of the art of *ſpeaking*. If there is not a foundation laid for it in the *earlier* part of life, there is no reaſonable ground of expectation, that any great degree of ſkill in it ſhould ever be attained. As it depends upon, and conſiſts in *practice*, more than theory, it requires the earlier initiation: that practice may have its full ſcope, before the time of life arrives, in which there may be occaſion for public exhibition. Mankind muſt *ſpeak* from the beginning, therefore ought, from the beginning, to be taught to ſpeak *rightly*; elſe they may acquire a habit of ſpeaking *wrong*. And whoever knows the *difficulty* of breaking through bad *habits*, will avoid that labour by *prevention*. There is a great difference between *ſpeaking* and *writing*. Some, nay moſt of mankind, are never to be *writers*. All are *ſpeakers*. Young perſons ought not to be put upon writing (from their *own funds*, I mean) till they have furniſhed their minds with *thoughts*, that is, till they have gotten funds: but they cannot be kept from ſpeaking.

Suppoſe a youth to have no proſpect either of ſitting in parliament, of pleading at the *bar*, of appearing upon the *ſtage*, or in the *pulpit*; does it follow, that he need beſtow *no pains* in learning to ſpeak properly his *native language*? Will he never have occaſion to read in a company of his friends, a copy of *verſes*, a *paſſage* of a *book*, or *news-paper*? Muſt he never read a diſcourſe of Tillotſon, or a chapter of the Whole Duty of Man, for the inſtruction of his children and ſervants? Cicero juſtly obſerves, that addreſs in ſpeaking *is highly ornamental, as well as uſeful, even in private life* *. The *limbs* are parts of the body much leſs noble than the *tongue*: Yet no gentleman grudges a conſiderable expence of time and money to have his ſon taught to uſe *them* properly. Which is very commendable. And is there no attention to be paid to the uſe of the *tongue*, the *glory* of man?

Suppoſing a perſon to be ever ſo ſincere and zealous a lover of *virtue*, and of his *country*; without a competent ſkill and addreſs in *ſpeaking*, he can only *ſit ſtill*, and ſee them *wronged*, without having it in his *power* to prevent, or redreſs, the evil. Let an artful and eloquent ſtateſman ha-

* *Cic.* de Orat. L. i. p. 83.

rangue

rangue the houſe of commons upon a point of the utmoſt conſequence to the public good. He has it greatly in his power to *miſlead* the *judgment* of the houſe. And he, who *ſees through* the deluſion, if he be aukward in delivering himſelf, can do *nothing* toward *preventing* the ruinous ſchemes, propoſed by the other, from being carried into execution, but give his *ſingle vote* againſt them, without ſo much as explaining to the houſe his *reaſons* for doing ſo. The caſe is the ſame in other ſmaller aſſemblies and meetings, in which volubility of tongue, and ſteadineſs of countenance, often carry it againſt ſolid reaſons, and important conſiderations.

To offer a help toward the improvement of youth in the uſeful and ornamental accompliſhment of ſpeaking properly their mother-tongue, is the deſign of this publication; to ſet about which I have been the more excited by experiencing, in my own practice, a *want* of ſuch a collection, as the following. What I propoſed to myſelf at firſt, was only to put together a competent *variety* of *paſſages* out of ſome of the beſt writers in proſe and verſe, for exerciſing youth in adapting their general manner of delivery to the *ſpirit* or *humour* of the various matter they may have occaſion to pronounce. Such a collection, I thought, might be acceptable to the public, in conſideration of its furniſhing at an *eaſy expence*, a general *variety* of examples for *practice*, choſen and pointed out, without trouble to maſters. A deſign, which as far as I know, has not before been executed *. On farther conſideration, it occurred to me, that it might render ſuch a publication more uſeful, if I prefixed ſome general obſervations on the method of teaching pronunciation, and put the emphatical words in italics, and marginal notes ſhewing the various *humours* or *paſſions*, in the ſeveral examples, as they change from one to another, in the courſe of the ſpeeches. All maſters of places of education are not, I fear, ſufficiently aware of the extent of this part of their duty; nor of the number of particulars to be attended to, which render it ſo *difficult* to bring a young perſon to deliver, in a completely proper manner, a ſpeech containing a conſiderable

* The PRECEPTOR, a work in two volumes 8vo, has ſome leſſons for practice; but not the *variety* of humours, or paſſions, which my deſign takes in; nor the notes of *direction* for expreſſing them properly. Beſides that the PRECEPTOR is a book of price, and fitter for the maſter's uſe, than the pupil's; ſo that I do not think it anſwers the purpoſe I had in view in this publication. If it did, I ſhould have uſed it. Otherwiſe, I think it an uſeful book, and am glad to find, that it is well received.

variety of different *humours* or *paſſions*. So that *ſome maſters*, as well as *all pupils*, may find their account in uſing this collection, till a better be publiſhed.

Whoever imagines the Engliſh tongue unfit for *oratory*, has not a juſt notion of it. That, by reaſon of the diſproportion between its vowels and conſonants, it is not quite ſo tractable as the Italian, and conſequently, not ſo eaſily applied to *amorous*, or to *plaintive* muſic, is not denied. But it goes better to *martial* muſic, than the Italian. And in oratory and poetry, there is no tongue, ancient, or modern, capable of expreſſing a greater *variety* of humours, or paſſions, by its *ſounds* (I am not ſpeaking of its copiouſneſs, as to *phraſeology*) than the Engliſh. The Greek, among the ancient, and the Turkiſh and Spaniſh, among the modern languages, have a loftier ſound, though the *gutturals* in them, of which the Engliſh is free (for it is probable, that the antient Greeks pronounced the letter χ gutturally) are, to moſt ears, diſagreeable. But there is not in thoſe languages, the *variety* of ſound which the Engliſh affords. They never quit their ſtiff *pomp*, which, on ſome occaſions, is *unnatural*. Nor is there, as far as I know, any language more *copious*, than the Engliſh; an eminent advantage for *oratory*. And if we muſt fall out with our mother-tongue, on account of ſome hard and *un-liquid* ſyllables in it, how ſhall we bear the celebrated *Roman* language itſelf, in every ſentence of which we find ſuch ſounds as tot, quot, ſub, ad, ſed, eſt, ut, et, nec, id, at, it, ſit, ſunt, dat, dant, det, dent, dabat, dabant, daret, darent, hic, hæc, hoc, fit, fuit, erat, erunt, fert, duc, fac, dic, and ſo on.

It is greatly to our ſhame, that, while *we* do ſo little for the improvement of our language, and of our manner of ſpeaking it in public, the *French* ſhould take ſo much pains in both theſe reſpects, though *their* language is very much *inferior* to *ours*, both as to emphaſis and copiouſneſs.

It is true, there is not now the ſame *ſecular* demand for eloquence, as under the popular governments of antient times, when twenty talents (ſeveral thouſands of pounds) was the fee for one ſpeech*; when the *tongue* of an orator could do more than the *ſceptre* of a monarch, or the *ſword* of a warrior; and when ſuperior ſkill in the art of haranguing was the certain means for elevating him, who poſſeſſed it, to the higheſt honours in the ſtate. Even in our own country, that is partly the caſe; for the inſtances of *bad*

* Pliny ſays, Iſocrates was paid that ſum for one oration.

ſpeakers

ſpeakers riſing to *eminent ſtations* in the government, are *rare*. But it muſt be owned, our politics now turn upon *other hinges*, than in the times when Greek and Roman eloquence flouriſhed. Nor are *we*, accordingly, like to beſtow the pains, which *they* did, for conſummating ourſelves in the art of Speaking. We ſhall hardly, in our ages, hear of a perſon's ſhutting himſelf up for many months in a cell under ground, to ſtudy and practiſe elocution uninterrupted: or declaiming on the ſea-ſhore, to accuſtom himſelf to harangue an enraged multitude without fear; or under the points of drawn ſwords fixed over his ſhoulders, to cure himſelf of a bad habit of ſhrugging them up; which, with other particulars, are the labours recorded to have been undertaken by Demoſthenes, in order to perfect himſelf, in ſpite of his natural diſadvantages, of which he had many, in the art of elocution. What is to be gained by ſkill in the art of ſpeaking may not now be ſufficient to reward the indefatigable diligence uſed by a Demoſthenes, a Pericles, an Æſchines, a Demetrius Phalereus, an Iſocrates, a Carbo, a Cicero, a M. Antony, an Hortenſius, a Julius, an Auguſtus, and the reſt. Yet it is ſtill of important *advantage* for all that part of youth, whoſe ſtation places them within the reach of a *polite education*, to be qualified for acquitting themſelves with reputation, when called to ſpeak in public. In *parliament*, at the *bar*, in the *pulpit*, at *meetings* of merchants, in *committees* for managing public affairs, in large ſocieties, and on ſuch like occaſions, a competent addreſs and readineſs, not only in finding matter, but in *expreſſing* and *urging* it effectually, is what, I doubt not, many a gentleman would willingly acquire at the expence of half his other improvements.

The reader will naturally reflect here upon *one* important uſe for good ſpeaking, which was *unknown* to the antients, viz. for the *miniſterial* function. I therefore have ſaid above, page 4, that we have not the ſame *ſecular* demand for elocution, as the antients; meaning, by reſervation, that *we* have a *moral*, or *ſpiritual* uſe for it, which *they* had not.

And no ſmall matter of grief it is to think, that, of the three learned profeſſions, real *merit* is there the *moſt ineffectual* toward *raiſing* its poſſeſſor, where it ought to be *moſt*; which muſt greatly damp *emulation* and *diligence*. An *able* phyſician, or lawyer, hardly fails of ſucceſs in life. But a clergyman may unite the *learning* of a Cudworth with the *eloquence* of a Tillotſon, and the *delivery* of an Atterbury: but, if he cannot make out a *connection* with ſome *great man*, and it is too well known by what means *they* are moſt com-

monly gained; he muſt content himſelf to be buried in a country curacy, or vicarage at moſt, for life.

If nature unaſſiſted could form the eminent ſpeaker, where were the uſe of *art* or *culture*; which yet no one pretends to queſtion? Art is but *nature improved upon* and *refined*. And before improvement is applied, genius is but a maſs of ore in the mine, without luſtre, and without value, becauſe *unknown* and *unthought of*. The ancients uſed to procure for their youth, maſters of pronunciation from the theatres *, and had them taught geſture and attitude by the palæſtritæ. Theſe laſt taught what is, among us, done by the dancing-maſter. And, as to the former, no man ought to preſume to ſet himſelf at the head of a place of education, who is not in ſome degree capable of teaching pronunciation. However, I could wiſh, that gentlemen, who have made themſelves perfect maſters of pronunciation and delivery, would undertake to teach this branch at places of education, in the ſame manner as maſters of muſic, drawing, dancing, and fencing, are uſed to do.

It is well when a youth has no natural *defect* or *impediment*, in his ſpeech. And, I ſhould, by no means, adviſe, that he, who has, be brought up to a profeſſion *requiring* elocution. But there are inſtances enough of natural defects ſurmounted, and eminent ſpeakers formed by indefatigable diligence, in ſpite of them. Demoſthenes could not, when he begun to ſtudy rhetoric, pronounce the firſt letter of the name of his art. And Cicero was long-necked, and narrow-cheſted. But diligent and faithful labour, in what one is in earneſt about, ſurmounts all difficulties. Yet we are commonly enough diſguſted by public ſpeakers liſping, and ſtammering, and ſpeaking through the noſe, and pronouncing the letter R with the throat, inſtead of the tongue, and the letter S like Th, and ſcreaming above, or croaking below all natural pitch of human voice; ſome mumbling, as if they were conjuring up ſpirits; others bawling, as loud as the vociferous venders of proviſions in London ſtreets; ſome tumbling out the words ſo precipitately, that no ear can catch them; others dragging them out ſo ſlowly, that it is as tedious to liſten to them, as to count a great clock; ſome have got a habit of ſhrugging up their ſhoulders; others of ſee-ſawing with their bodies, ſome backward and forward, others from ſide to ſide; ſome raiſe their eyebrows at every third word; ſome open their mouths frightfully; others keep their teeth ſo cloſe together, that one would think their jaws were ſet; ſome ſhrivel all their features together into the middle

* *Quinct.* C. x.

middle of their faces; ſome puſh out their lips, as if they were mocking the audience; others hem at every pauſe; and others ſmack with their lips, and roll their tongues about in their mouths, as if they laboured under a continual thirſt. All which bad habits they ought to have been broken of in *early youth*, or put into ways of life, in which they would have, at leaſt, offended *fewer* perſons.

It is through neglect in the *early* part of life, and bad habits taking place, that there is not a public ſpeaker among twenty, who knows what to do with his *eyes*. To ſee the venerable man, who is to be the mouth of a whole people confeſſing their offences to their Creator and Judge, bring out theſe awful words, "Almighty and moſt merciful Fa-"ther, &c." with his eyes over his *ſhoulder*, to ſee who is juſt gone into the pew at his elbow; to obſerve this, one would imagine there was an abſolute *want* of all feeling of *devotion*. But it may be, all the while, owing to nothing but *aukwardneſs*; and the good man looks about him the whole time, he is going on with the ſervice, merely to keep himſelf in *countenance*, not knowing, elſe, where to put his *eyes*.

Even the players, who excel, beyond compariſon, all other ſpeakers in this country, in what regards decorum are, ſome of them, often guilty of monſtrous *improprieties* as to the management of their eyes. To direct them full at the *audience*, when they are ſpeaking a *ſoliloquy*, or an *aſide-ſpeech*, is unſufferable. For they ought not to ſeem ſo much as to think of an *audience*, or of any perſon's looking upon them, at *any* time; eſpecially on *thoſe* occaſions; thoſe ſpeeches being only thinking aloud, and expreſſing what the actor ſhould be ſuppoſed to wiſh *concealed*. Nor do they always keep their *eyes fixed* upon thoſe they *ſpeak to*, even in *impaſſioned* dialogue. Whether it is from *heedleſſneſs*, or that they are more *out of countenance* by looking one another ſtedfaſtly in the face, I know not: but they do often ramble about with their eyes in a very unmeaning, and unnatural manner.

A natural genius for delivery ſuppoſes an *ear*; though it does not always ſuppoſe a *muſical** ear. I have never heard poetry, particularly that of Milton, better ſpoken, than by a gentleman, who yet had ſo little diſcernment in muſic, that, he has often told me, the grinding of knives entertained him as much as Handel's organ.

* Yet Quintillian would have his orator by all means ſtudy *muſic*. C. viii.